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K'taka R-Day tableau junked, CM fumes

Siddaramaiah in a letter has requested Rajnath Singh to allow the 'Brand B'luru' tableau

BENGALURU, 11 JAN

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has written to Defence Minister Rajnath Singh requesting him to allow the state to showcase its tableau themed 'Brand Bengaluru' in the Republic Day parade at 'Kartavya Path'.

Expressing his displeasure over the Centre's denial to present its tableau, he said the decision had hurt the sentiments of Kannadigas.

In a letter addressed to Singh, which he shared on 'X', Siddaramaiah said Karnataka has been taking part in the Republic Day parade at Kartavya Path, New Delhi, with its tableau for the last 14 years consecutively. He underlined that Karnataka has won numerous prizes for its tableaux in the Republic Day parades with various themes, such as Maha Mastakabhishek of Bhagwan Baahubali (2005), Architecture of Hoysala (2008), Bidari Art of Bidar (2011), Bhootaradhane (2012), Channapattana Toys (2015) and Traditional Art Forms of Karnataka (2022). Each tableau in Karnataka shows the rich culture, folklore and traditions of the state.

The theme 'Brand Bengaluru' was selected from among the five themes proposed by Karnataka for the 2024 Republic Day parade.

"The state had presented the key-model and the music before the selection committee and it had asked us to attend the next meeting with certain modifications. However, after the last round of meeting, Karnataka has not been included in the 2024 Republic Day parade to be conducted at Kartavya Path. Instead, the tableau has been accommodated in the 'Bharat Parv' section at the Red Fort," Siddaramaiah said.

According to him, the tableau themed 'Brand Bengaluru' depicts how the iconic city of Bengaluru has leapfrogged in development and yet is firmly rooted in its culture and tradition.

The state's contribution to 'Vikasit Bharat' is immense - be it technology, entrepreneurship or tax contribution. The grand Terminal-2 of the Kempe Gowda International Airport is the newest feather in its cap. It has been declared as one of the most beautiful airports in the world by UNESCO, the chief minister pointed out.

"The decision not to allow Karnataka tableau at this year's Republic Day parade has hurt the sentiments of Kannadigas. The exclusion has met with strong disappointment from the people of Karnataka," Siddaramaiah said. —*PTI*

Siddaramaiah and Rajnath Singh **PHOTO: PTI**

> **The decision not to allow Karnataka tableau at this year's Republic Day parade has hurt the sentiments of Kannadigas. The exclusion has met with strong disappointment from the people of Karnataka**
>
> -Siddaramaiah, Chief Minister

Yuva Nidhi scheme to be launched today

Bengaluru, 11 Jan

Shivamogga is decked up for the launch of the Congress government's fifth poll guarantee Yuva Nidhi' scheme on 12 January, which offers unemployment assistance to graduates and diploma holders who passed in the academic year 2022-23. Government has promised to give Rs 3,000 per month to degree holders and Rs 1,500 per month to diploma holders who were unable to get a job in the past six months and are not pursuing their higher studies. The assistance will be paid for two years. The event will be held on the birth anniversary of youth icon Swami Vivekananda on 12 January at Shivamogga. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

Parl's Budget session likely between 31 Jan & 9 Feb

NEW DELHI, 11 JAN

A brief Budget session of Parliament is likely to be held between 31 January and 9 February, sources said on Thursday. President Droupadi Murmu will address a joint sitting of the two houses on 31 January, they said. The government would present a vote-on-account or an 'interim budget' on 1 February. The new government will present a full-fledged budget later. Since the term of the 17th Lok Sabha ends on 16 June, it is set to be the last session of Parliament before general elections are announced. In 2019, the Lok Sabha polls were announced on 10 March and voting was held in seven phases between 11 April and 19 May. —*PTI*

ICJ finishes 1st day of genocide hearing against Israel

THE HAGUE, 11 JAN

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) has finished three hours of very detailed descriptions of hearing arguments on day one of case that Israel is committing genocide in its war on Gaza. According to ICJ it is a very compelling case of genocide that Israel is now committing in Gaza. South Africa is asking the court to quickly decide on urgent provisional measures to ask Israel to stop whatever it is doing: Military action, mass displacement, depriving Gazans of food, shelter, water, and basic healthcare. Historians, who have been following the ICJ for many years, say that this is the most detailed, most gruesome case so far. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 6

Hasina sworn in as PM of B'desh for 5th term

DHAKA, 11 JAN

Sheikh Hasina was on Thursday sworn in as the prime minister of Bangladesh for the fifth term, days after her Awami League party won an overwhelming majority in the general elections boycotted by the main opposition BNP and its allies. President Mohammad Shahabuddin administered the oath of office to 76-year-old Hasina at a ceremony joined by politicians, foreign diplomats, civil society figures and senior civil and military officials. Following the prime minister, the new members of cabinet were sworn in by the President. Hasina's party won 223 seats in the 300-member Parliament. Major opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party of ex-prime minister Khaleda Zia boycotted the elections after their demand for a non-party caretaker government to oversee the 7 polls was rejected. —*PTI*

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Covid JN 1 variant: 199 cases reported so far in State

NEW DELHI, 11 JAN

A total of 827 cases of Covid-19 sub-variant JN 1 have been reported from 12 states till now, sources said on Thursday. As many as 250 cases have been reported from Maharashtra, 199 from Karnataka, 155 from Kerala, 49 from Goa, 36 from Gujarat, 30 from Andhra Pradesh, 30 from Rajasthan, 26 each from Tamil Nadu and Telangana, 22 from Delhi, three from Odisha, and one from Haryana. Meanwhile, India recorded 514 new cases of Covid-19, while the number of active cases of the infection has declined to 3,422, Health Ministry said on Thursday. —*PTI*

Cousins assumed to be interfaith couple assaulted

BELAGAVI, 11 JAN

Seven men were arrested and two minors apprehended in a case of moral policing in which they allegedly assaulted two cousins whom they mistook to be an interfaith couple, in Belagavi, police said on Thursday.

The incident took place last Saturday, 6 January, two days before another instance of moral policing happened in Haveri, about 170 km away.

According to the police, the victims who are in their 20s were sitting at Fort Lake here and having a conversation when a gang of men, including minors, arrived. Assuming that they were a couple in an interfaith relationship, the gang allegedly took the two people to a room near the lake and assaulted them with pipes.

The woman, who is a graduate, had visited her college to collect some documents. She was told to wait till 3.30 pm, so her cousin joined her and they were waiting at Fort lake.

She was wearing hijab while the boy sported a tilak. Assuming that they were a couple, the accused assaulted them. Despite the victims telling the gang that they were cousins, they were not spared, a senior police officer said.

The girl's mother is a Hindu and her father is a Muslim. The girl's mother and the boy's mother are sisters, he said.

After the incident, the gang fled the spot. Meanwhile, the boy told his parents who immediately informed the police who then reached the spot, the officer said. In the attack, the boy sustained serious injuries. —*PTI*

NIA raids 32 locations in 6 states in terror-gangster case

NEW DELHI, 11 JAN

National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Thursday seized illegal arms and ammunition, along with incriminating documents, digital devices and cash, in a multi-state crackdown in connection with cases relating to conspiracies and activities of the banned Babbar Khalsa International (BKI) and the Lawrence Bishnoi crime syndicate.

A total of 32 locations in Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi, as well as Chandigarh, were raided by NIA teams as part of the mega operation that began early on Thursday morning, a spokesperson of the agency said.

The seizures during the searches carried out in connection with three cases included two pistols, two magazines and ammunition, along with cash amounting to Rs 4.6 lakh, besides documents and digital devices.

A total of 32 locations in Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi, as well as Chandigarh **PHOTO: ANI**

The three cases are related to the terror activities being carried out by the BKI, which was banned under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), and the terrorist-gangster networks operating in the country. Their activities include smuggling and induction of terrorist hardware, such as arms and ammunition, explosives, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) etc., from across the borders, the NIA spokesperson said. The terror hardware is being used by the operatives of terror outfits and organised criminal syndicates for carrying out bomb blasts, targeted killings, extortions and funding of such outfits in various parts of the country.

Thursday's crackdown involved raids at 16 locations in a case related to the activities of the chiefs and members of the BKI. —*PTI*

INTER-MINISTERIAL MEET NEXT WEEK ON RED SEA CRISIS

NEW DELHI, 11 JAN

Union Ministry of Commerce and Industry has called a high-level inter-ministerial meet next week to discuss ways to insulate India's trade from the ongoing problems in the Red Sea, a senior official said on Thursday.

Senior officials from five ministries -- external affairs, defence, shipping and finance and commerce -- will participate in the deliberations. The commerce ministry has also set up an internal strategic group, comprising additional secretaries of the ministry, to discuss global issues impacting the country's trade on a daily basis and prepare a strategy to deal with them.

"The idea of the inter-ministerial meeting is to see how we can strategise our trade so that it gets least affected in such a situation," the official said. —*PTI*

AFTER INDIA BOYCOTT

Maldives in talks with China to increase tourists

BEIJING, 11 JAN

Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu on Thursday met Chinese Premier Li Qiang and discussed ways to increase the number of tourists from China to his tourism-dependent country, besides the implementation of a host of new projects that Beijing has committed to undertake during his ongoing visit.

After his high-profile meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping on Wednesday after which the two countries signed 20 agreements, Muizzu on the penultimate day of his five-day visit met Li and deliberated on increasing cooperation in e-commerce, the capital Male development plan, airport expansion and other development projects.

They also discussed increasing direct flights and further cooperation in tourism, a readout posted on the website of the Maldives President's office said. With Muizzu, regarded as a pro-China leader, now entangled in a diplomatic row with India after three of his Ministers posted derogatory remarks against Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he has been pressing Beijing to intensify efforts to increase Chinese tourist numbers to his country amid reports of spate cancellation of reservations by Indian tourists in protest against the Maldives Ministers derogatory comments.

Maldives' first lady Sajidha Mohamed and President Mohamed Muizzu with Chinese President Xi Jinping and his wife Peng Liyuan during a welcome ceremony at the Great Hall of the People **PHOTO: AFP**

> They also discussed increasing direct flights and further cooperation in tourism, Maldives President's office said.

Though Muizzu has suspended three deputy Ministers who posted the derogatory comments, this has already resulted in backlash from Indian tourists who flocked in far larger numbers to the Maldives.

Chinese analysts say the strategically placed Maldives with a host of islands is significant for expanding China's influence in the Indian Ocean region. Li told Muizzu that China proposed to offer avenues of support to Maldivians in various fields, including scholarship opportunities, vocational training, sports training, fisheries and maritime cooperation, ecological cooperation, metrological technologies, and more, the readout said.

He also extended his government's support to Xi's Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative, and the Global Civilisation Initiative aimed at extending China's influence in the world besides the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Under BRI, China has invested in several projects in the Maldives.

Muizzu's visit to China will conclude on Friday. —*PTI*

REDUCE MAN-ANIMAL CONFLICT

Jumbo corridor in Kanakapura to open in Mar

MEGHANA PRASAD
BENGALURU, 11 JAN

The much-awaited elephant corridor on the busy Kanakapura Road (National Highway-209) at Agara Cross in South Bengaluru is expected to open its doors in March this year.

Wild jumbos have been crossing the NH-209 highway to move between Bannerghatta National Park and Savandurga Reserve Forest in Ramanagar District. The overpass is expected to reduce man-animal conflict and prevent the elephants from being run over by vehicles on the stretch.

The project to consider the overpass was mooted after the death of a wild elephant in March 2023 after being hit by a BMTC bus near Roerich and Devika Rani Roerich Estate on Kanakapura Road. "The project, costing around Rs 32.4 crore, was started in March 2023 and is scheduled to be completed by March 2024," a Project Manager of National Highway Authority of India, Ramanagara, told Salar News. After the launch of the overpass, animals can move between the forests without coming in contact with humans, he said. Having crash barriers to prevent straying into roads, the new overpass will have a width of around 40 metres and a length of around 45 metres.

he overpass is expected to reduce man-animal conflict and prevent the elephants from being run over by vehicles **PHOTO: SALAR**

> The corridor will also prevent wild elephant attacks on vehicles. There are currently 9 elephant corridors in Karnataka.

The corridor will also prevent wild elephant attacks on vehicles. There are currently 9 elephant corridors in Karnataka.

Dr Prayag Hodigere Siddalingappa, Chief Wildlife Veterinarian, said: "There are underpasses for tigers in Maharashtra and overpasses for animals are already there in foreign countries. I am happy that we are moving towards that direction."

As Bengaluru expands, it even encroaches upon the elephant and wildlife habitats.

The highways and roads that cut through the forests disrupt animals' traditional migratory routes to acquire food and water, and they then tend to stray into farmlands and roads leading to human-wildlife conflicts, the forensic expert said.

The new corridor not only plays a vital role in the survival of the majestic gentle giants but also prevents their conflicts with humans. —*Salar News*

Mehbooba escapes unhurt in car accident

SRINAGAR, 11 JAN

PDP Chief Mehbooba Mufti, two people, including a security personnel were injured on Thursday as she had a narrow escape in a road accident at Sangam in Jammu and Kashmir's Anantnag district, officials said.

The vehicle of the former Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister collided with a civilian car at Sangam, a police official said.

Mufti, who was on her way to Khanabal to meet the victims of a fire incident, did not suffer any injuries. However, her driver and a member of her personal security sustained minor injuries, the official said.

Mufti's vehicle was badly damaged in the accident, but she went ahead with her scheduled visit in another car. A spokesperson of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) said Mufti was safe and did not suffer any injuries.

Mehbooba's car **PHOTO: PTI**

Mufti's daughter Iltija Mufti, who is also the media advisor to the PDP President, confirmed that her mother is safe.

"Mufti's car met with a terrible accident enroute Anantnag today. Thanks to the grace of god she and her security officers escaped unhurt without any serious injuries," Iltija Mufti posted on X. —*PTI*

Maheshwar Rao is the new BMRCL MD

BENGALURU, 11 JAN

IAS officer Maheshwar Rao M has been appointed as the new Managing Director (MD) of Bengaluru Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL) on Thursday. The Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs has approved the appointment and has ordered the Karnataka government to not assign additional responsibilities without prior consent. Bengaluru South MP, Tejaswi Surya requested for the intervention of Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri, for the appointment of a full-time MD.Surya met Puri in Delhi and requested for an inspection of Namma Metro projects in Bengaluru at the earliest. Sharing the details of his meeting on X, Surya pressed for the need for MD to lead Metro operations particularly on the Yellow Line as it is facing delays due to the absence of a full-time MD.Accusing the Congress State government for lacking interest in the appointment process,Surya wrote, "The State government seems least bothered about the delay and the cost overruns of Namma Metro, despite multiple reminders." Surya requested the Minister to assess the status of all the Metro projects including the most awaited airport line. The Yellow Line, which stretches 18.8 km from RV Road to Bommasandra with 16 stations, has been delayed. Surya cited supply issues with the rolling stock for the metros during his inspection on 4 October, 2023.He is a 1995 batch IAS officer, Additional Secretary & Financial Advisor, Department of Space. —*Salar News*

Min raises concerns over unscientific silt removal in lakes

BENGALURU, 11 JAN

Karnataka Minister NS Boseraju on Thursday raised concerns over "unscientific removal" of silt in lakes under the jurisdiction of the State's minor irrigation department and directed officials to immediately take stringent action to put an end to it. The Minister for Minor Irrigation, and Science and Technology said this "indiscriminate"silt-lifting is contributing to lake suffocation, water scarcity, and financial losses to the government.Highlighting the detrimental effects of "unscientific" silt removal, he said: "The improper extraction of silt, exceeding specified limits in some cases, not only results in financial losses to the government but also contributes to water depletion in lakes, leading to severe water shortages," .Boseraju also emphasised its adverse impact on groundwater levels.The Minister instructed the Secretary of the department to issue strict directives to Superintending Engineers of all Circles and Executive Engineers of all Divisions."These directives aim to prompt strict legal action against any activities involving the unscientific lifting of silt, with the goal of safeguarding the State's water resources and preventing further environmental damage," he added. —*PTI*

First cruise ship of the year arrives at New M'lore Port

MANGALURU, 11 JAN

The first cruise ship of the new year, MS Riviera' arrived at New Mangalore Port (NMP), the port authorities said.This is the fourth cruise vessel docking at the port here during the current season. The Marshall Islands-flagged ship docked along berth No. 04, with 980 passengers and crew members on Wednesday.The vessel arrived enroute from the ports of Dubai, Mumbai and Mormugao. The overall length of the ship is 239 metre with a carrying capacity of 66,172 Gross tonnage and a draft of 7.60 metre. The cruise passengers were given a warm welcome to the melody of Mangalore's brass brand and by Yakshagana artistes. The tourists were overjoyed to see the various cultural attractions made available for them in the cruise lounge, the release said. —*PTI*

CM backs Congress stand on Ram Temple

Siddaramaiah claims BJP is using Ram Mandir to cover their failures

BENGALURU, 11 JAN

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah charged BJP and RSS of insulting 140 crore Indians ***PHOTO: IANS***

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Thursday endorsed Congress high command's decision not to attend the consecration of Ram Temple in Ayodhya, saying BJP has turned a religious event into a political affair.

In a statement, the Chief Minister charged BJP and RSS with having turned a religious event into a party function thereby insulting 140 crore Indians.

Referring to the purported statement of the secretary of the Ram Mandir trust that Shaiva and Shaktas have no authority in the Ram Mandir, he said it has caused controversy. Four Shankaracharyas are reported to have boycotted the consecration of the temple "in protest against the misuse of the Ram Mandir for politics", he said.

In a statement on 'X', Siddaramaiah said, "AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge, senior leader of our party Sonia Gandhi and leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, who are not participating in the Ramlalla inauguration programme in Ayodhya, are correct in their decision, which I support."

He accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the leaders of the Sangh Parivar of having 'disrespected' Lord Ram and the 140 crore people of the country by politicising a religious event that should be conducted with devotion and respect for all, regardless of caste, religion, party-sect, into a party function.

The hollowness of Hinduism of the culture and customs of Hinduism preached by BJP and RSS leaders has been exposed through their silence on inaugurating the unfinished Ram temple, the Chief Minister said. According to Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra trust, the complete construction of the temple, including all the floors, will be completed by December 2024.

The Congress leader alleged that the Prime Minister, who is about to complete 10 years of rule, does not have the confidence to win the elections by presenting his achievements to the voters. For this reason, ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, he is hurriedly inaugurating the Rama Temple, which is in an incomplete state, and through this, he has tried to cover up his failure by attempting to create a Hindutva wave, he said.

Siddaramaiah underlined that the Congress party has remained committed to its stand since the day the Ram Janmabhoomi dispute began. Averring that Congress was not against Hinduism, the CM said the grand old party is, however, against untouchability, casteism, bigotry and corruption in the name of religion. "We have no problem with the Hindu religion which has been practised by many dignitaries of the country including Mahatma Gandhi, Swami Vivekananda, Kanakadasa, Narayana Guru, Kuvempu but we continue to oppose the hypocritic Hindutva of BJP and the Sangh Parivar, who are using religion for political gain," he added.

Reacting to the Congress leaders declining invitation, former chief minister BS Yediyurappa said, "Congress is hurting the sentiments of Hindus and they are trying to ruin something good.

The Congress leaders should explain the reason for declining the invitation. They will surely regret not attending the event later."

—*Salar News/PTI*

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar inaugurating the public grievances redressal programme at Bommanahalli Assembly constituency on Thursday ***PHOTO: SALAR***

DKS suspends corrupt officer

BENGALURU, 11 JAN

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar has suspended an official working in a tahsildar office in City for asking for a bribe of Rs 4,000 from an old woman to give her widow's pension. Shivakumar called the tahsildar and ordered the suspension after hearing her plea during a p held at Bommanahalli constituency on Thursday.

The State Congress president said a majority of complaints were of stipends, account problems and tax burden. "To reduce the tax burden on the people, we will discuss with the authorities to check if we can amend the law. In the Goods and Services Act implemented in 2020, the penalty for late payment is double the dues. We are discussing a way to reduce it. People should be given sufficient time and compensation."

The Deputy Chief Minister promised a remedy for thousands of applicants requesting the construction of schools, cemeteries, and public spaces such as parks.

Shivakumar said a lot of people have raised concerns about housing. "Several people have paid money for the house but they have not received one, I will look into it," he said.

About the Ram Temple issue, he said, "Religion should be observed in politics, but religion should not be politicised."

Shivakumar directed officials from BWSSB and BDA on Thursday to ensure the supply of Cauvery water to citizens in the Bengaluru South Assembly constituency within the next 3-4 months. This announcement came during the public grievances redressal programme held in Yelachenahalli.

Highlighting the significance of community service, Shivakumar quoted Shivakumara Swami seer, encouraging individuals to aim for goodness, which in turn, leads to greatness.

He also discussed the necessity for an alternative route in the 18km stretch of the Bengaluru South assembly constituency, mentioning ongoing endeavours to resurrect an old BDA proposal for connectivity between Kanakapura and Electronic City.

—*Salar News*

Cong MLA 'directly' involved in sale of jobs in KOMUL: ED

NEW DELHI, 11 JAN

Nanjegowda ***PHOTO: X/@KYNANJEGOWDAMLA***

A committee headed by Congress MLA KY Nanjegowda "accommodated" 30 candidates referred by some politicians for jobs in dairy cooperative KOMUL by "completely manipulating" the interview process and in lieu of kickbacks, Enforcement Directorate alleged on Thursday.

The 61-year-old legislator from the Malur Assembly seat in Kolar district and those linked to him were raided by the central agency on 8 January as part of a money laundering investigation into alleged irregularities in the hiring of staff for KOMUL and illegal allotment of government land valued at Rs 150 crore.

ED said it unearthed a "scam" in the recruitment in Kolar-Chikkaballapura District Co-operative Milk Producers Union Limited (KOMUL). "It was noticed that the recruitment committee of KOMUL chaired by KY Nanjegowda and four other members completely manipulated the interview process. According to the board decision, orders were issued to the selected candidates and they were sent to training without making the final result public," the agency said.

It was "admitted" by the directors of KOMUL and members of its recruitment committee that seats were sold for money ranging from Rs 20-30 lakh per seat, ED claimed. It is also gathered that certain politicians have referred their candidates for selection and a total of 30 such references were accommodated, it said."KY Nanjegowda being the head of the recruitment committee is actively and directly involved in the sale of seats and manipulation of interview marks," the ED said.—*PTI*

Cong mins in Delhi to plan for LS polls

BENGALURU, 11 JAN

Karnataka Ministers on Thursday headed to New Delhi to attend a meeting convened by the central leadership of Congress to discuss strategies for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections in the State.

Ministers KN Rajanna, KJ George, BZ Zameer Ahmed Khan, G Parameshwara, Laxmi Hebbalkar, NS Boseraju and RB Thimmapur are among those who flew to the national capital in the morning, Congress sources said.

"The information we have is that 29 ministers have been summoned to Delhi to discuss strategies," a senior Congress leader said.

The key focus this time is to identify the right candidates, and find ways to counter the Rama Temple issue so that it does not adversely affect the party's poll prospects in Karnataka, he said.

"The ministers will be asked to publicise the five guarantees (pre-poll promises of the party) and other welfare schemes of the State government. Our key strength in the Lok Sabha election is our five guarantees, which no other State has implemented," the Congress leader claimed.

While Rama temple may come up for discussion, the Congress leader said the party is not unduly worried about it.

"We are not very much thinking about the Ram Temple issue because the Hindu community itself is divided with four Shankaracharyas reportedly not attending the consecration ceremony at Ayodhya on 22 January," a Congress source said.

He also underlined that the demand by some ministers that three deputy chief ministers should be appointed in Karnataka may not come up for discussion in the meeting. "Our party president Mallikarjun Kharge has snubbed the ministers and MLAs demanding it.

He has strictly told them not to raise this issue till the elections are over," the source said.

—*PTI*

CONGRESS' 5TH POLL PROMISE

Government has promised to give Rs 3,000 per month to degree holders ***PHOTO: SALAR***

Yuva Nidhi scheme to be launched today

BENGALURU, 11 JAN

Shivamogga is decked up for the launch of the Congress government's fifth poll guarantee Yuva Nidhi' scheme on 12 January, which offers unemployment assistance to graduates and diploma holders who passed in the academic year 2022-23.

Government has promised to give Rs 3,000 per month to degree holders and Rs 1,500 per month to diploma holders who were unable to get a job in the past six months and are not pursuing their higher studies. The assistance will be paid for two years.

The event will be held on the birth anniversary of youth icon Swami Vivekananda on 12 January at Shivamogga. A massive stage has been erected and seating arrangements have been made for over 85,000 people to attend the event, the organisers said.

The Yuva Nidhi' scheme will be launched in the presence of Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, Skill Development Minister Dr Sharanaprakash Patil, ministers including Madhu Bangarappa, Dr MC Sudhakar, legislators, officials and other dignitaries.

More than one lakh beneficiaries from Shivamogga, Davanagere, Chitradurga, Chikkamagaluru, Udupi and Haveri districts are expected to take part in the event which begins at 11am. The first allowance will be released soon after the launch of the programme, the organisers said.

Patil, whose department is implementing the Yuva Nidhi scheme, said in a statement that the scheme is applicable only to those graduates and diploma holders whose domicile is Karnataka.

Only those applicants who have obtained degree/diploma in 2023 and faced unemployment even after 180 days of completion of their education are eligible for the benefit under the scheme. The dole will end soon after the applicant gets a job, the Statement said

The unemployment allowance will be available till the applicant gets a job or for a maximum of two years from the date of application, the Statement added.

The applicant must possess Aadhar card, bank passbook, ration card, mark sheets of SSLC, PUC, degree or diploma, it further said.

The applications can be submitted at Karnataka One, Grama One, Bapuji Seva Kendra or Seva Sindhu portals.

The State government has earmarked Rs 250 crore this year. It expects that next year, it will cost Rs 1,200 crore and from 2026 onwards government will spend Rs 1,500 crore annually on Yuva Nidhi.

Congress government has already launched four of the five guarantees, which are Shakti', providing free rides to Karnataka women in non-luxury government buses, Anna Bhagya' offering 10 kg rice to BPL families, Gruha Jyoti' giving free electricity up to 200 units to household users, and Gruha Lakshmi' promising Rs 2,000 a month to women heads of families having APL/BPL ration cards.

—*PTI*

6 men rape woman over inter-faith relations

HAVERI, 11 JAN

In a disturbing development, a victim of moral policing released a video on Thursday in which she said that she was repeatedly gang-raped by vigilantes in Haveri district.The homemaker was dragged out of a hotel by six men after being seen with a person from another religion and beaten up in Hangal town on 8 January.Police said they have arrested two of the men in connection with the case and are trying to trace others. The police said the accused were not affiliated to any organisation, but were previously booked in a similar case.

The victim said that, when she was at the hotel, a gang of five to six men barged inside, questioned her and took her on their bikes forcibly.

They took her to an isolated place and assaulted her brutally and later, all of them raped her. Later, they asked her to sit in a car and the driver also raped her.

She was later taken to two to three places and gang-raped. The accused later took her to a National Highway and she got on a bus.

"I want them to be punished," she demanded in the video in an appeal to the police.

Haveri SP, Anshu Kumar Srivastava, said a case would be filed and investigated. Earlier, the woman had gone to the police station in Hangal and made a statement before senior officers and police woman.

—*Salar News*

BENGALURU CEO SUCHANA SETH CASE: GOA POLICE TO RECREATE CRIME SCENE

PANAJI, 11 JAN

Goa police would on Friday take Suchana Seth, the CEO of a start-up who is accused of killing her four-year-old child, to a service apartment where she had stayed to recreate the crime scene, a senior official said. This is required as part of the investigation into the case, the official said on Thursday.

Seth, 39, checked in the apartment at Candolim in Goa on 6 January and stayed there till 8 January. She allegedly killed her son in the apartment and stuffed the body in a bag before taking it to Karnataka in a taxi on Monday, police said. She was arrested from Chitradurga on Monday night and brought to Goa on Tuesday. —*PTI*

3 shops raided for selling counterfeit tea

BENGALURU, 11 JAN

Madanayakanahalli police conducted a crackdown on three shops for selling counterfeit of 3 Roses Tea Powder, Surf Excel, and Rin powderin Gangondana halli, Nelamangala. Three people were secretly running production of counterfeit of the products from a house and supplying it to the three shops. During the raid, authorities seized 200 kg of tea powder and a processing machine.

Police Inspector Muralidhar MK told Salar News, "Acting on information from Hindustan Unilever Company, we conducted raids on stores connected to individuals who haven't been arrested yet. Madhu Singh, Vikram Singh, and Shivakumar, originally from Rajasthan, are involved in running this criminal network by distributing fake products in various significant areas."

—*Salar News*

SWACHH SURVEKSHAN AWARDS

Mysuru: Once crowned, now striving to reclaim cleanest city title

MYSURU, 11 JAN

Despite being recognized twice as the 'Cleanest City' in India, Mysuru has experienced a significant setback in the Swachh Survekshan rankings for 2023. The city failed to secure a spot in the top 20 cleanest cities of the country, marking a departure from its previous achievements.

During the awards ceremony held on Thursday, Indore and Surat were jointly crowned as the cleanest cities in India. Among the top 20 cities, Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh each contributed four cities to the list.

Mysuru had initially claimed the title of the nation's cleanest city in the first two Swachh Survekshan assessments conducted in 2015 and 2016. However, its ranking saw a decline in subsequent years, dropping to fifth place in 2017 and further to eighth in the following year. The city made a noteworthy comeback in 2019, securing the third position. In 2020, Mysuru regained its status as the cleanest city among urban centers with a population

ranging from three to ten lakh. It served as a role model for other cities, with civic authorities from Indore and Bhopal visiting Mysuru to learn from the initiatives undertaken by the Mysore City Corporation (MCC) in maintaining cleanliness.

MCC Additional Commissioner MJ Roopa told Salar News that public cooperation is essential to get top rankings in the survey. Roopa said she would examine the report on the survey on Friday and would reveal the exact reason for the City missing out.

N Virupakshappa, a resident in Jayalakshmipuram in the City, said, "It is crucial for us to reflect on the areas where the City is falling short, identifying the aspects where we garnered lower scores." A collaborative effort was required from both citizens and MCC to reclaim the top spot, he said. He proposed regular use of the Swachhata app, a complete halt to plastic usage, installation of dustbins at historic sites, mandatory waste segregation and improvements in solid waste management as essential measures for reclaiming the coveted position.

–*Salar News*

PHOTO: PTI

NC Prez Farooq Abdullah skips ED appearance

SRINAGAR/ NEW DELHI, 11 JAN

National Conference (NC) President Farooq Abdullah did not appear before the Enforcement Directorate on Thursday for questioning in a money laundering case, official sources said. The 86-year-old politician was called by the central agency at its Srinagar office in connection with an ED investigation into alleged irregularities in the Jammu and Kashmir Cricket Association (JKCA). It was not immediately known if the agency issued him a fresh date. The MP from Srinagar Lok Sabha seat was charge-sheeted by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in the JKCA case in 2022. The agency's case is based on a 2018 charge sheet filed by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) against the same accused. *—PTI*

Pankaj Tripathi steps down as EC's national icon

NEW DELHI, 11 JAN

Actor Pankaj Tripathi, who was appointed as the 'National Icon' of the Election Commission of India, has voluntarily stepped down from his position."Acknowledging his role as a political leader in an upcoming film, actor @PankajTripathi has voluntarily stepped down as #ECI National Icon as per terms of MoU. #ECI expresses gratitude for his impactful contribution to voter awareness & #SVEEP since Oct 2022," read a statement on the social media handle of ECI, posted by Spokes person ECI on X.Pankaj Tripathi was roped in as the ECI National Icon in October 2022.Tripathi is playing the role of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in the biopic 'Main Atal Hoon'. *—ANI*

Assets of Muslim organizations in J&K to be seized

NEW DELHI, 11 JAN

Centre on Thursday directed the Jammu and Kashmir administration to seize all assets and freeze bank accounts and finances belonging to the pro-Pakistan separatist amalgam Tehreek-e-Hurriyat and Muslim League Jammu Kashmir headed by separatist Masarat Alam. Both the organisations were recently banned by the government. Issuing two identical notifications, the Union Home Ministry said the Muslim League Jammu Kashmir (Masarat Alam faction) was declared unlawful outfit on 27 December, 2023 under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 and the Tehreek-e-Hurriyat, Jammu and Kashmir (TeH) was banned on December 31, 2023 under the same law. The objective of the TeH is to separate Jammu and Kashmir from India.*—PTI*

City court to frame charges against Balaji on 22 Jan

CHENNAI, 11 JAN

A sessions court here would frame charges against Tamil Nadu Minister V Senthil Balaji, arrested by the ED last year in connection with a money laundering case, on 22 January. Principal Sessions Judge S Alli, before whom Senthil Balaji was produced by the prosecution through video-conferencing from the Central Prison here on Thursday, also extended his remand till 22 January. Special Public Prosecutor N Ramesh opened the case for prosecution under section 226 Cr.P.C, which says when the accused appears or was brought before the court in pursuance of a commitment of the case under section 209, the prosecutor shall open his case by describing the charge brought against the accused and stating by what evidence he proposes to prove the guilt. *—PTI*

'Declining Ram Temple invite is anti-Hindu'

BJP said Cong's decision to not attend opening has exposed its opposition against Hinduism

NEW DELHI, 11 JAN

BJP on Thursday slammed Congress' decision to decline the invitation to its three top leaders to attend the Ram temple consecration ceremony in Ayodhya, claiming it has exposed the party's inherent opposition to India's culture and Hindu religion.

Due to its feelings of "jealousy, malice and inferiority complex" towards Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Congress had gone to the extent of opposing the country and is now opposing God, BJP spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi told reporters.

Ram temple in Ayodhya symbolises the highest values of Indian traditions and culture, he said, but for the Congress and other opposition parties with a similar mindset extremist politics is more important, he alleged.

Trivedi noted that Iqbal Ansari, the Muslim litigant in the land dispute case involving the temple and the Babri mosque which one stood there, was also extended an invite reflecting the Hinduism's generosity and he accepted it as well but it is the Congress which has chosen to boycott the ceremony.

He claimed that it has been the main opposition party's tendency to create hurdle during historic moments for the country.

"Whenever the page of history turns, Congress instead of standing with it has opted to boycott," he said, citing a host of events, including the inauguration of the new Parliament building, enactment of the GST, presidential addresses to Parliament by Ram Nath Kovind and Droupadi Murmu.

People have also continued to keep Congress away from power but it is not getting any wiser, he said, adding the party had an opportunity to redeem its past mistakes but it has wasted the chance.

He also rejected the Congress' contention that BJP and the RSS had appropriated the entire event, scheduled for January 22 in Ayodhya, saying there is no division among people in the temple. It should not be linked to any organisation or ideology, he said.

The BJP spokesperson wondered if the Congress still stands with the idea of rebuilding the mosque, which was torn down by a frenzied mob in Ayodhya in 1992.

Noting that the then prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru was opposed to the association of President Rajendra Prasad and some leaders of the Congress with the rebuilding and inauguration of the Somnath temple, Trivedi claimed the Congress is continuing with his legacy and has disowned the 'Ram Rajya' concept of Mahatma Gandhi.

—PTI

BJP's poster on X that said 'note the faces of the Sanatan opponents who rejected the invitation for temple ceremony' ***PHOTO: X***

- Due to its feelings of "jealousy, malice and inferiority complex" towards Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Congress had gone to the extent of opposing the country and is now opposing God, BJP spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi told reporters

Advani to attend temple consecration

NEW DELHI, 11 JAN

BJP stalwart LK Advani, who was at the forefront of the Ram janmabhoomi movement, will attend the consecration ceremony at the Ram temple in Ayodhya on 22 January, VHP President Alok Kumar said on Thursday.

However, it remains unclear whether party veteran Murli Manohar Joshi will attend the ceremony or not. "We will make special arrangements for him," Kumar told PTI.

Advani, 96, is a founding member of BJP and, along with Joshi, was at the forefront of Ram janmabhoomi movement in the 1980s and early 1990s.The Ram temple trust had last month said that both Advani and Joshi were unlikely to attend the consecration ceremony due to their health and age.

LK Advani ***PHOTO: PTI***

Trust general secretary Champat Rai had told reporters, "Both are elders of the family and considering their age, they were requested not to come, which was accepted by both ."As Rai's statement kicked off a controversy, VHP working president Kumar said in a statement the next day that he had invited Advani and Joshi to attend the consecration ceremony.

—PTI

100 chartered flights expected in Ayodhya: UP CM

New Delhi, 11 Jan

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Thursday said 100 chartered flights are expected to land at the Ayodhya airport for the Ram temple consecration ceremony on 22 January. The Airport was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 30 December. He was speaking at the virtual function for the inauguration of the Ayodhya to Ahmedabad flight by IndiGo.*—PTI*

Ch'garh okays free train travel scheme for Ayodhya

Raipur, 11 Jan

BJP government in Chhattisgarh has approved an annual free train travel scheme for people who want to go for darshan of Lord Ram at Ayodhya temple. The decision was taken on Wednesday at a meeting of the state cabinet chaired by Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai, an official said. Over 20,000 people would be taken to Ayodhya on annual pilgrimage by train. *—PTI*

'1 nation, 1 polls ' is not acceptable, says Mamata

KOLKATA, 11 JAN

West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee on Thursday said the 'One Nation, One Election' idea is not practically feasible going by India's federal structure.

Hours after sending a letter to Dr Niten Chandra, Secretary of a high-level committee that has called for suggestions for implementation of the idea, Banerjee requested the Election Commission of India (ECI) to look into the matter "very very rationally".

"I do not appreciate it in a practical sense because it is not possible, not acceptable, and not correct from the federal structure point of view. I will request the ECI to see it very sincerely, they have to be very very rational in this case particularly," Banerjee told reporters at the state secretariat.

"This is not only our voice but INDIA's voice. We must see our state policy, central policy, state structure, our federal structure," she added.

The high-level committee headed by former president Ram Nath Kovind had written to political parties seeking their opinion on the matter.

The committee has held two meetings since it was constituted in September last year. It has sought views from the public on the issue and has also written to political parties seeking their views and interaction on a "mutually agreed date" on the idea of simultaneous polls. *—PTI*

Mamata Banerjee ***PHOTO: PTI***

Setback for INDIA seat-sharing in Bengal as TMC, Cong spar

NEW DELHI, 11 JAN

Trinamool Congress(TMC) will not send its representatives for any meeting with the Congress' national alliance committee on seat-sharing for the Lok Sabha elections as it has already conveyed its position to the grand old party, TMC sources said on Thursday.

The Congress panel has been holding seat-sharing talks with INDIA bloc partners from different states.

TMC sources said the Congress contacted party leaders for such a meeting and has been conveyed that they are not keen on sending any representative for talks.

They said the Trinamool Congress has offered two seats to the Congress -- the ones it won in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. West Bengal has 42 parliamentary constituencies. The Congress has said the offer is too low and difficult to accept. Any change in the offer can only be made by West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, they said. The TMC is also looking at fighting from one seat in Meghalaya and at least two in Assam, party sources said.

They added that while the local unit of TMC had an aspiration to fight from one seat in Goa, where it got around five per cent vote share in the 2021 Assembly polls, it will not press for it and support the Congress in the coastal state.

In West Bengal, Congress got a vote share of 2.93 per cent in the 2021 Assembly polls, 12.25 per cent in the 2016 Assembly polls, and 5.67 per cent in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

"The Congress leadership should acknowledge the ground reality in Bengal. They are weak," the leader said.

"We are ready to lead the fight in West Bengal, we are committed to the INDIA bloc and to defeating the BJP. Our position is clearly spelt out with data, so there is no need for one to go to Delhi and have another discussion," the TMC leader said.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the TMC won 22 seats in West Bengal, the Congress won two, and the BJP secured 18 seats.

—PTI

Congress panel has been holding seat-sharing talks with INDIA bloc partners from different states ***PHOTO: PTI***

ATTACK ON ED OFFICIALS

HC gives protection to ED officers in Sandeshkhali case

KOLKATA, 11 JAN

Calcutta High Court on Thursday granted interim protection to Enforcement Directorate (ED) officials who were attacked by a mob when they went to search the premises of TMC leader Shajahan Sheikh at Sandeshkhali on 5 January.

The protection came as Justice Rajasekhar Mantha ordered an interim stay on further proceedings by the state police on an FIR against those ED officials till 31 March.

In the FIR, one Didar Baksh Molla, stated to be a caretaker of Sheikh's residence, accused the ED officials of theft, outraging modesty and beating up women and children when they went to raid Sheikh's house on 5 January in connection with an alleged ration distribution scam in West Bengal. ED moved the court praying for quashing of the FIR lodged at Nazat police station in North 24 Parganas district against its officials, claiming that false allegations were foisted on them.ED has stated that three of its officers were injured and their belongings were snatched in an attack on them at Sandeshkhali in North 24 Parganas district on 5 January.Three FIRs were registered on that day in connection with the incident.Justice Mantha noted that the suo motu police FIR states that around 3,000 people had gathered near the house of Sheikh.

HC dismisses PIL seeking NIA or CBI probe into attack on ED officialsCalcutta high court on Thursday dismissed a PIL seeking NIA or CBI investigation into an attack on Enforcement Directorate officials in West Bengal's Sandeshkhali, observing that the ED has all the expertise and wherewithal to handle the situation.The court said that the petitioner, who is a practising advocate, appears to have not done any research on the matter and that the PIL is based solely on newspaper reports.The petitioner prayed for transfer of investigation into the attack on ED officials from the state police to the National Investigation Agency (NIA) or the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), claiming that the local police would not be able to hold the probe in an impartial manner since the accused is a leader of the ruling party in the state. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

- ED has stated that three of its officers were injured and their belongings were snatched in an attack on them at Sandeshkhali in North 24 Parganas district on 5 January

HC junks OPS' plea on AIADMK flag

CHENNAI, 11 JAN

Madras high court on Thursday dismissed the appeals filed by expelled AIADMK leader O Paneerselvam(OPS), challenging an order of a single judge which restrained him from using the official letterhead, reserved symbol 'Two Leaves' and the official flag of the party.

A division bench comprising Justices R Mahadevan and Mohammed Shaffiq dismissed the three appeals filed by Paneerselvam against the order dated 7 November, 2023.

The bench however, granted liberty to OPS to approach the single judge by filing necessary applications seeking to vacate the order, if any, passed against him. On filing of such application, the judge shall consider and pass appropriate orders, on its own merits and in accordance with law, the bench added.

Originally, on a suit filed by AIADMK General Secretary and former Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami, Justice N Sathishkumar had in November last passed an interim order, restraining OPS from using the party letterhead, symbol and flag. Aggrieved, Paneerselvam filed the present appeals. *—PTI*

Assam will be third state to introduce Uniform Civil Code: Assam CM

GUWAHATI, 11 JAN

Assam will be the third state after Uttarakhand and Gujarat to introduce a Bill seeking a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) and it will exempt the tribal communities from the ambit of the law, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said here on Thursday.A UCC means having a common law for all citizens of the country that is not based on religion. Personal laws and laws related to inheritance, adoption are to be covered by a common code.'We are waiting for the Uttarakhand Bill on UCC and after it is introduced, Assam will follow it with certain additional clauses,' the Chief Minister said The model will have certain innovative points as the state is fighting against child marriage and polygamy, he said. *—PTI*

'Assam denied nod for halts during Cong yatra'

GUWAHATI, 11 JAN

Congress on Thursday said the Assam government has denied night-stay permissions at public grounds for its leaders in two districts during the ensuing 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra.'

Leader of the Opposition Debabrata Saikia said the party is now looking for alternative arrangements of private farmlands for stationing the containers, where senior national leaders, including Rahul Gandhi, will halt for a night.

"We sought a school ground at Gogamukh in Dhemaji district for only the night stay by parking our container vehicles. The permission was initially given, but at the last moment it was withdrawn," he said.In a similar manner, a college in Jorhat district refused to allow us for one night at its playground, he said.

The Yatra, to be led by MP Rahul Gandhi, will commence from Imphal on 14 January and culminate on 20 March in Mumbai. The Assam leg of the march is scheduled from 18 to 25 January.

Govt will give permission for Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra : Himanta

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma Thursday said the government will give permission to the Congress to hold its Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra if it seeks permission. But there is no information yet on the Congress seeking permission to hold the Yatra in Assam, he asserted.*—PTI*

INSTITUTE OF NATIONAL IMPORTANCE

Doesn't matter if AMU minority body: SC

NEW DELHI, 11 JAN

How does it matter for people whether the Aligarh Muslim University is a minority institution or not when it has continued to be an institute of national importance without the minority tag, the Supreme Court said on Thursday as it underlined that the intent of Article 30 of the Constitution is not to "ghettoise the minority".

Article 30 deals with the right of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions.

The apex court also deliberated upon what would be the impact on the 2006 Allahabad High Court verdict striking down the provision of the 1981 amendment Act by which the university was accorded the minority status, if the bench were to hold that S Azeez Basha versus Union of India case was wrongly decided.A five-judge constitution bench of the top court had in S Azeez Basha versus Union of India case in 1967 held that since AMU was a central university, it cannot be considered a minority institution.

"Without the minority tag, the institution has continued to be an institution of national importance. How does it matter for the people whether it is a minority institution or not? It is only the brand name, AMU," observed the bench, also comprising Justices Sanjiv Khanna, Surya Kant, JB Pardiwala, Dipankar Datta, Manoj Misra and Satish Chandra Sharma.Advocate Shadan Farasat, appearing for one of the petitioners favouring minority status of AMU, said until the Basha judgement came, the varsity was considered as a minority institution."Basha (judgement) came. 1981 amendment sought to undo it. Thereafter, it has been litigated through and there has always been a stay, except from the reservation aspect," he said. A minority institution has the liberty of not granting quotas for Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, and OBC candidates. *—PTI*

Supreme Court underlined that the intent of Article 30 of the Constitution is not to 'ghettoise the minority' ***PHOTO: PTI***

FIR against TN BJP President for 'promoting enmity'

DHARMAPURI, 11 JAN

Police on Thursday said an FIR has been registered against Tamil Nadu BJP President K Annamalai for allegedly promoting religious enmity.The case against Annamalai comes after his visit to Lourdes Church on 8 January in Dharmapuri district, when he faced opposition from some young men and an argument ensued between the saffron party leader and the youths.

The locals raised the Manipur issue and the travails of the Christians in the northeastern state. Eventually, however, Annamalai garlanded a statue in the church and offered prayers. Dharmapuri district police said a case has been registered following a complaint from a local resident.*—PTI*

Uttar Pradesh to have 5 more airports: Scindia

NEW DELHI, 11 JAN

Civil aviation minister JyotiradityaScindia on Thursday said five new airports will be inaugurated in Uttar Pradesh in one month. He was speaking at the virtual function for the inauguration of flight service by IndiGo from Ayodhya to Ahmedabad. Ayodhya airport will be expanded and the runway will be extended that will allow landing of bigger aircraft and operation of international flights, Scindia said. The Maharishi Valmiki International Airport in Ayodhya was inaugurated by Prime Minister NarendraModi on 30 December. On that day, IndiGo and Air India Express operated flights to Ayodhya. Scindia on Thursday said five new airports will be inaugurated in Uttar Pradesh in one month that will take the total number of airports in the state to 19.The airports at Azamgarh, Aligarh, Moradabad, Chitrakoot and Shravasti will come up in the state.*—PTI*

Pune factory fire: HC grants relief to land owner

MUMBAI, 11 JAN

Bombay High Court has granted interim protection from arrest to a 61-year-old woman owner of a land in Maharashtra's Pune district where a fire at a candle manufacturing factory last month killed 14 people. A single bench of Justice SarangKotwal on Tuesday granted the interim protection to JannatShikalgar till 6 February and sought the prosecution's response to her plea seeking pre-arrest bail in the case. Shikalgar has been charged by Dehu Road police at Pimpri-Chinchwad in Pune district under Indian Penal Code sections for culpable homicide not amounting to murder, negligent conduct with respect to fire or combustible material and explosive substance and causing hurt, as well as provisions of Explosives Act. The fire following a blast at the sparkling candles manufacturing factory on 8 December, 2023 claimed 14 lives. Shikalgar is the owner of the land where the factory is located. Apart from Shikalgar, the FIR also named her husband and the factory owner. *—PTI*

No warm clothes to wear, boy dies of cold in Bihar

MOTIHARI, 11 JAN

A 10-year-old school student died in East Champaran district of Bihar on Wednesday due to persisting cold wave. The case was from Adarsh Government Middle School, Chakia, where a sixth-grade student named Manish Kumar fell unconscious during prayer.The teachers admitted him to a local sub-divisional hospital. The district education officer said, "The child had come to school without wearing warm clothes and without eating, due to which he had fainted during prayer."Kumar, the 10-year-old son of Rajesh Ram, was a resident of the sugar mill in Jiraat, Chakia. Like every day, he went to school on Wednesday as well. *—ANI*

Court to pass order on police closure report against Brij

NEW DELHI, 11 JAN

A Delhi court is likely to pronounce on 2 March its order on whether to accept a police report seeking cancellation of a complaint filed by a minor wrestler against former Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) chief and BJP MP BrijBhushanSharan Singh accusing him of sexual harassment.Additional Sessions Judge ChhaviKapoor, who was scheduled to pass the order on Thursday, said some clarifications were required in the matter.The Delhi Police had on 15 June, 2023 filed a report before the court seeking cancellation of case by the girl.The report for closure of the case was filed after the girl's father claimed she had lodged the complaint against Singh over perceived injustice to her. *—PTI*

Rajnath discusses Defence ties with Sunak during visit

Sunak, Rajnath agree on the need for the 2 countries to work in tandem

LONDON, 11 JAN

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh concluded his visit to the UK on Thursday after a "warm meeting" with British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and interacting with members of the Indian diaspora at a community reception.

Singh called on Prime Minister Sunak at 10 Downing Street here on Wednesday evening for discussions on a wide range of issues across bilateral defence and economic ties.

According to the Indian Ministry of Defence readout of the meeting, Sunak agreed with the minister on the need for the UK and India to work in tandem and expressed hope that the ongoing free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations could be brought to a successful conclusion soon. India and the UK are currently holding the 14th round of FTA negotiations with the aim of significantly enhancing the annual GBP 36-billion bilateral partnership.

Sunak is said to have also underlined his keenness, and that of his government, to strengthen the defence and security pillar of the bilateral relationship, including through government backing for stronger business and technology partnerships with Indian counterpart entities. Meanwhile, Singh briefed Sunak about his "positive interactions" with the UK defence industry and the "new positive energy" in the bilateral defence relationship during his tour of the UK, the first by an Indian Defence Minister in 22 years.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh meets UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak in London on Thursday *PHOTO: ANI*

He also met with UK Foreign Secretary David Cameron at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and reflected on the new momentum and direction of the India-UK partnership, symbolised by intense engagements at various levels.

Singh "outlined his goal of integrating defence industries of both countries including through supply chain integration to build resilience.

He also emphasised the importance of bilateral start-up level interaction, and identification and discussion of joint projects which India and UK could implement together," the Ministry of Defence said.

Cameron reiterated the UK government's desire to collaborate with India in the defence areas, particularly in the field of defence industrial collaboration, as one of the means by which the UK hopes to strengthen the support for a rule-based international order. Later on Wednesday evening, Singh interacted with nearly 200 people of Indian origin at a community reception organised by the High Commission of India in London. Indian military ex-servicemen and family members of World War II veterans were also present at the event, during which the minister addressed the gathering to apprise them of the fast pace of growth and development underway in India.

"It is projected that by 2075-2080, India will be the No. 1 country in terms of economic ranking.

This is the image of India today because of the fast pace of growth," said Singh in an address to the gathering in Hindi, which was later briefly summarised by Indian High Commissioner to the UK Vikram Doraiswami in English. *—PTI*

Heavy fuel leaked, spills into Manipur streams

Manipur government sounded an alert and called for immediate action as black fluid suspected to be heavy fuel leaked from a power station in Imphal *PHOTO: PTI*

IMPHAL, 11 JAN

Manipur government sounded an alert and called for immediate action as black fluid suspected to be heavy fuel leaked from a power station in Imphal valley and spilled into streams flowing alongside it on Thursday.

The incident took place on Wednesday at Leimakhong power station in Kangpokpi district. Streams passing through villages such as Kanto Sabal and Sekmai were affected by the spill.

These streams meet the Imphalriver -- the lifeline of the region -- downstream.

Heavy machinery was deployed to divert the flow of the water in the affected streams towards fields.

"It is yet to be determined if miscreants were involved in this or if it was accidental," an official said.

Locals said the water of the streams is used by them for daily chores.

Earlier, on Wednesday four residents of Bishnupurdistrict, went missing after reportedly venturing out to the hills to collect firewood. Later, three bodies were found and one person is still missing.

The deceased are Ibomcha Singh, 51; and his son Anand Singh, 20; and Romen Singh, 38.

A gunfight was reported between unidentified groups on Wednesday in the area where the bodies were located.

Meanwhile, huge cache of arms and explosives were seized from Churachandpur and Tengnoupal districts on Thursday. In Churachandpur, the security forces seized a carbine, a country-made 9 mm pistol, five single barrel guns, eight HE-36 hand grenades, six tear gas shells and several ammunitions for 9 mm pistol and M1 Carbine on 9 January.

In Tengnoupal district, four HE-36 grenades, an unserviceable AK-56 rifle, five country-made shotguns, five crude bombs, four IEDs, a country-made mortar and ammunitions for AK-56 rifle on 6 January.

Search operations were continuing in vulnerable areas of Imphal West, Kakching, Bishnupur, Thoubal, Imphal East and Churachandpur districts for arms and ammunition, police said.

More than 180 people have been killed and several hundred injured since ethnic violence broke out in Manipur in May last year. *—PTI*

Netflix removes 'Annapoorani' for hurting Hindu sentiments

MUMBAI, 11 JAN

'Annapoorani', a Tamil film by Nayanthara, has been removed from Netflix just weeks after its digital premiere.

This comes after a police complaint was lodged against the actors, makers and the streaming platform for hurting religious sentiments of Hindus. Bajrang Dal activist and founder of Hindu IT CellSolankihave filed separate complaints against Nayanthara. The complaints allege that the film makes controversial remarks about Lord Ram and also promotes 'love jihad'.

According to his complaint, the film 'Annapoorani' demeans Lord Ram and it was intentionally released to hurt the religious sentiments of Hindus. Solanki also cited a few scenes in the movie, which he says hurt the religious sentiments.

The complaint mentions the last scene of the film which shows a temple priest's daughter, played by Nayanthara, offering namaz wearing 'hijab' before making biryani.

It mentions one more scene in which Nayanthara goes to Farhaan's place for 'iftaari'. Solanki demanded in his complaint that a first information report (FIR) be filed against actor Nayanthara, director NileshKrishnaa and others for hurting religious sentiments and promoting 'love jihad'. "Love jihad" is a term used by right-wing groups and activists to allege a concerted effort by Muslim men to convert Hindu women to Islam. *—PTI*

Situation along Northern border stable but sensitive: Army Chief

NEW DELHI, 11 JAN

Army Chief Gen Manoj Pande on Thursday said the situation along Line of Actual Control in eastern Ladakh is "stable" but "sensitive", and asserted that Indian troops are maintaining a "high state" of preparedness to deal with any challenge.

A day ahead of Army Day, Gen Pande also said both India and China continue to hold talks at military and diplomatic levels to find a resolution to the remaining issues. "Our operational preparedness continues to be at a high level," he said, noting that the Indian Army is maintaining adequate reserves to confront any security challenge in the region.

Indian and Chinese troops are locked in an over three-year confrontation in certain friction points in eastern Ladakh even as the two sides completed disengagement from several areas following extensive diplomatic and military talks.

Manoj Pande *PHOTO: PTIV*

On the situation in Jammu and Kashmir, Gen Pande said the ceasefire understanding with Pakistan is holding along Line of Control (LoC) though there have been infiltration attempts. "We are foiling infiltration attempts along LoC," he said.

Gen Pande said there has been a drop in overall incidents of violence in Jammu and Kashmir but such incidents have increased in Rajouri-Poonch sector. Terror infra continues to thrive across the border, he said in an apparent reference to Pakistan's support to various terrorist groups. "This is an area where our adversary is active in abetting terrorism," he said referring to Rajouri-Poonch sector.

Closely monitoring: Pande on boundary talks

As Bhutan and China looked at an expeditious resolution of their festering boundary row, Army Chief Gen Pande said the development is being closely monitored.

At a media briefing ahead of the Army Day, he said India has a unique bilateral relationship with Bhutan based on "utmost trust, goodwill and mutual understanding".

'416 Myanmar soldiers entered

India'About 416 Myanmarese soldiers crossed over to India in view of the situation arising out of the fighting between Myanmar's armed ethnic groups and the government forces, and Indian military is "closely watching" the unfolding developments, Army Chief Gen Manoj Pande said on Thursday. *—PTI*

SWACHH SURVEKSHAN

Indore bags cleanest city tag for 7th time

INDORE, 11 JAN

Indore secured the top position among the 'cleanest cities' of India for the seventh consecutive time on Thursday. The civic officials saying the city's effective, sustainable and durable waste management system played a big role in this success.

This time, Indore, also known as Madhya Pradesh's industrial capital, shared the top position with Gujarat's Surat city in the central government's annual cleanliness survey for 2023.

The survey, based on the theme 'Waste to Wealth', saw a tough competition among more than 4,400 cities in different categories.

President Droupadi Murmu gave away the awards to the winners at an event held in New Delhi.

Indore bagged the cleanest city title for the seventh time in a row *PHOTO: ISTOCK*

The survey carried a total of 9,500 marks.

Indore city secured 4,709.40 marks out of 4,830 under 'Service Level Progress' .The waste from 4.65 lakh households and 70,543 commercial establishments is systematically sorted at the primary source and processed and disposed of at different plants in the city, Indore Municipal Corporation's (IMC) officials said.

Nearly 692 tonnes of wet waste, 683 tonnes of dry waste and 179 tonnes of plastic waste are collected every day in the city under different categories, they said.

For this, around 850 specially-designed vehicles are run across the city having different compartments for bio-waste items like diapers and sanitary napkins. The waste from households in the city is collected after segregation under six categories at the doorsteps.

A 'Gobar-Dhan' plant is being run by a company under public-private partnership (PPP) on 15 acres of land at Devguradiya trenching ground in the city.It has the capacity to produce 17,000 to 18,000 kg of bio-CNG and 100 tonnes of organic fertilisers by processing 550 tonnes of wet waste (like fruits, vegetables and raw meat waste) every day, officials said. *—PTI*

PANNUN CASE

US objects to providing defence info to Nikhil

NEW YORK, 11 JAN

US government has objected to providing defence materials to Indian national Nikhil Gupta, detained in a Czech prison on murder-for-hire charges in a foiled assassination attempt on a Khalistani extremist, saying it will provide the information only upon his appearance in a New York court and arraignment in the case.

Gupta, 52, was charged by federal prosecutors here in an indictment unsealed in November last year with working with an Indian government employee in the foiled plot to kill Khalistani separatist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, who holds dual US and Canadian citizenships, on American soil. Gupta was arrested in Prague, the Czech Republic on 30 June, 2023 and is being held there currently. US government is seeking his extradition to America.

Gupta's attorney filed a Motion to Compel Production of Discovery' on 4 January in the US District Court, Southern District of New York requesting the court to direct federal prosecutors to provide "the defence materials relevant to its ability to defend the instant charges."

US District Judge Victor Marrero had on 8 January given the government three days' time to respond to the motion filed by Gupta's attorney. The government, in its reply filed with the district court on Wednesday, said Gupta's motion asking for discovery material should be denied. "The government respectfully submits this letter in opposition to defendant Nikhil Gupta's motion to compel discovery during the pendency of his extradition proceedings in the Czech Republic," federal prosecutors said.

They said consistent with federal rules of criminal procedure, "the government is prepared to produce discovery promptly upon the defendant's appearance in this District and arraignment on this case.

Before then, however, the defendant is not entitled to discovery, and he identifies no good reason for the Court to order it." *—PTI*

DGP POST

IPS officer moves SC against HC order

NEW DELHI, 11 JAN

Senior IPS officer Sanjay Kundu has moved Supreme Court against an order of Himachal Pradesh High Court dismissing his plea for recall of a direction to remove him from the post of DGP over allegations that he tried to pressure a businessman who claimed to have received a threat to his life from his partners. The appeal is yet to be listed for hearing.

On 9 January, in a setback to Kundu and Kangra SP ShaliniAgnihotri, the high court dismissed their petition to recall its order of 26 December, 2023, that directed their transfer so that they don't influence the probe in the case. The high court had also turned down their request for a CBI probe and directed the constitution of a Special Investigation Team consisting of officers of Inspector General level to coordinate investigations in all FIRs within two weeks.

Disapproving of the conduct of the two officers, the high court had said the "attempt of the DGP to settle the dispute seems to be a colourable exercise of his power and authority prima facie". It had said Kundu's "interference" in a civil dispute was "highly improper". It had also observed there was "prima facie dereliction of duty" on Agnihotri's part. *—PTI*

Himachal Pradesh High Court *PHOTO: PTI*

Gender: Education on y-chromosomes needed

NEW DELHI, 11 JAN

Parents who give their daughter-in-laws a hard time for not being able to fulfil their desire of "preserving their family tree", need to be educated that it is their son and not his wife whose chromosomes will decide the child's gender, Delhi High Court has observed.

The high court, which was dealing with a case of dowry death of a woman after being allegedly harassed by her husband and in-laws for bringing insufficient dowry and giving birth to two daughters, said in contemporary times, the idea of a woman's worth being tied to material considerations contradicts the principles of equality and dignity. "The persistent prevalence of regressive mindsets and instances exemplified by cases involving insatiable demands for dowry underscores a broader societal concern. It highlights the challenges faced by married women, whose intrinsic value and dignity should not be contingent upon their parents' ability to meet the insatiable financial demands from their in-laws," Justice SwaranaKanta Sharma said. The high court said it is disturbing to witness a scenario where parents wish for the well-being of their daughter and her comfort after she leaves her paternal house and tries to settle in the matrimonial home but instead of providing her love and support, the new bride is met with unrelenting greed and harassment from in-laws' family. *—PTI*

Delhi High Court *PHOTO: PTI*

HOPES, HOMES SHATTERED

A Palestinian man sits near the rubble of a house destroyed in an Israeli strike, in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip
PHOTO: REUTERS

Maldivians concerned over nation's spat with India

In cafés and restaurants lining the narrow streets of Male, the capital of Maldives, the hot topic of discussion is how a spat with India got out of control - and what would be Delhi's reaction to it.

Following the "derogatory" comments made by three Maldivian junior ministers against Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the tourism paradise is in danger of facing a boycott by Indian tourists - who are one of the largest contributors to the country's income.

Indians were the largest group of tourists by nationality that visited the Maldives last year. Tourism accounts for almost one third of the country's economy.

The ministers, who have since been suspended, had called Modi a "clown", a "terrorist" and a "puppet of Israel" on social media.

The comments sparked outrage and boycott calls against Maldives on Indian social media.

The controversial posts were deleted following the uproar and the Maldivian foreign ministry put out a statement saying the comments made by the ministers were personal and did not represent the views of the government.

The Maldives consists of about 1,200 coral islands and atolls located in the middle of the Indian Ocean. The archipelago has a population of about 520,000 compared to India's 1.4 billion.

As a small island nation, the country depends on its giant neighbour India for most of its food, infrastructure building, and technological advancement.

Several residents in Male say they are worried the diplomatic spat could hamper relations between the two countries.

"We were disappointed with the boycott calls [from India]. But we were more disappointed with our government. There was a lack of good judgement on the part of our officials", Mariyam Eem Shafeeg, a student at the Maldivian National University told the BBC.

Others point out that Maldives also has strong cultural ties with India as people there grow up watching Bollywood films and dramas.

The Maldives consists of about 1,200 coral islands and atolls located in the middle of the Indian Ocean. As a small island nation, the country depends on its giant neighbour India for most of its food, infrastructure building, and technological advancement ***PHOTO: BBC***

"We also depend on India for food, education and healthcare, Ms Shafeeg, a supporter of Maldivian Democratic Party, added. The Maldivian Democratic Party has had a "India first" policy and is believed to have close ties with Delhi.

The three Maldivian officials made the controversial comments in response to Modi's post on X (formerly Twitter) which included photos promoting tourism to the Indian island chain of Lakshadweep.

Following the uproar, many Indians on social media said they were cancelling their holiday plans in the Maldives.

Shortly after, the CEO of Indian ticket-booking site EaseMyTrip announced that his company had suspended all flight bookings to the country.

Abdulla Ghiyas, president of the Maldives association of travel agents and tour operators, said there have not been a lot of cancellations at resorts and hotels. "But we have seen some sort of slowdown in bookings," he added.

The entire controversy has erupted at a time when the Maldivian president Mohamed Muizzu has embarked on a state visit to Beijing.

Muizzu, who's known for his pro-China policy, has requested Beijing to send more tourists to Maldives.

Chinese tourists used to dominate tourist arrivals in the Maldives before the Covid-19 pandemic. But Beijing is yet to resume direct flights to Male, resulting in a sharp fall in tourism from the country.

"China was our number one market pre-Covid, and it is my request that we intensify efforts for China to regain this position," Muizzu said during his visit.

But several Maldivians have criticised Muizzu for not taking stronger action against the three lawmakers for their controversial remarks.

"The ministers should have been sacked straightaway. We are worried now about India's reaction as we depend on our neighbour for most of our food items," Aik Ahmed Easa, a lawyer affiliated with the opposition told the BBC.

The Confederation of All India Traders, one of the biggest trade bodies in the country, has asked its members to stop doing business with the Maldives until the authorities there issue an apology.

Many, however, point out that calls for a boycott could also affect Indians who live in the Maldives. It is estimated that around 33,000 Indians work in the country's construction, hospitality and retail sectors.

"A significant number of Indians are also working in the Maldives tourism sector, many of them as managers and front office staff," Ghiyas said.

—BBC News

LETTERS Write to us at salar@salar.news

SALAR سالار

US-Indian satellite set to study Earth's frozen regions

- The target launch readiness date is January 2024, according to ISRO

NISAR, the radar satellite, set to be launched this year in joint collaboration with the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and US space agency National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), will measure some key Earth vital signs, including the health of wetlands, ground deformation by volcanoes, and the dynamics of land and sea ice.

It will measure the health of wetlands from ground deformation by volcanoes to the dynamics of land and sea ice," NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory said in a press release.

This will help researchers decipher how small-scale processes can cause monumental changes in the ice sheets covering Antarctica and Greenland, as well as on mountain glaciers and sea ice around the world.

"Short for NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar, NISAR will provide the most comprehensive picture to date of motion and deformation of frozen surfaces in Earth's ice- and snow-covered environments, collectively known as the cryosphere," the release said.

The target launch readiness date is January 2024, according to ISRO.

Alex Gardner, a glaciologist at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Southern California said, "Our planet has the thermostat set on high, and Earth's ice is responding by speeding up its motion and melting faster."

"We need to better understand the processes at play, and NISAR will provide measurements to do that," he added.

Set to be launched in 2024 by ISRO from southern India, NISAR will observe nearly all the planet's land and ice surfaces twice every 12 days, according to NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory press release.

The satellite's insights into Earth's cryosphere will come from the combined use of two radars: an L-band system with a 10-inch (25-centimeter) wavelength and an S-band system with a 4-inch (10-centimeter) wavelength.

NISAR's orientation in orbit will enable it to collect data from Antarctica's far interior, close to the South Pole. Antarctica's ice sheets hold the planet's largest reservoir of frozen fresh water, and the rate at which it may lose ice represents the greatest uncertainty in sea level rise projections, according to NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

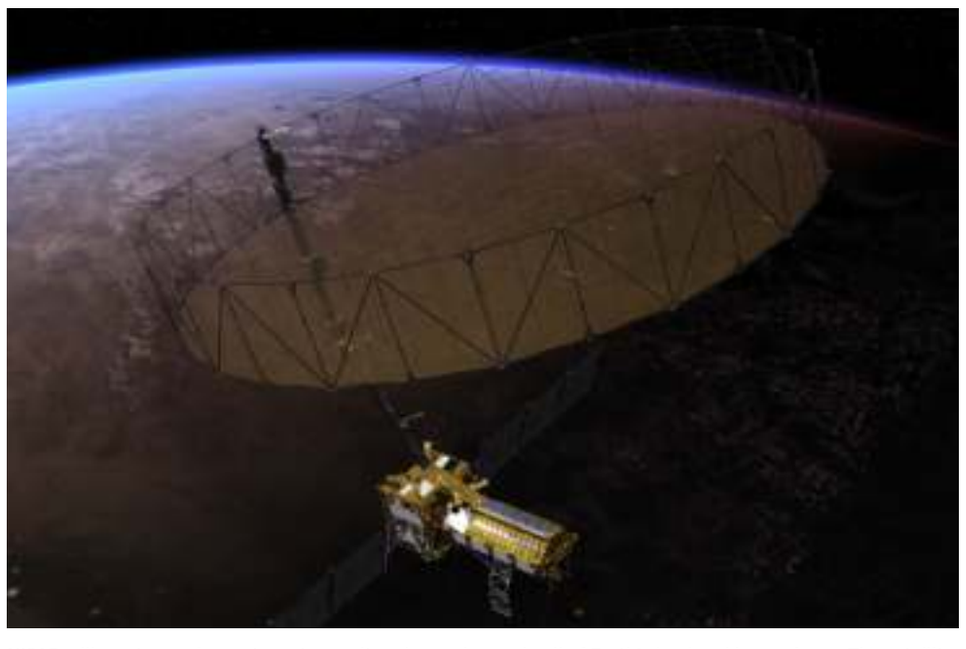
According to the press release, NISAR's increased coverage will be crucial for studying the motion of ice flowing down from central Antarctica's high elevations towards the sea. The measurements will also enable scientists to closely study what happens where ice and ocean meet.

Both Antartica and Greenland have ice shelves--masses of ice that extend from land and float on the ocean that are thinning and crumbling as icebergs break off. Ice shelves help keep glacial ice on the land from slipping into the ocean. If they are diminished, glaciers can flow and calve faster.

Ice losses on both Antarctica and Greenland have accelerated since the 1990s, and there's uncertainty about how quickly each will continue to recede. NISAR will improve horizontal and vertical views of these changes."NISAR will give us a consistent time-lapse movie of that motion, so we can understand how and why it's changing and better predict how it will change into the future," said Ian Joughin, a glaciologist at the University of Washington in Seattle and the NISAR cryosphere lead.The satellite will also track changes in Earth's mountain glaciers. In the Himalayas, NISAR's all-weather capability will help researchers monitor how much water is stored in glacial lakes, which is essential to analysing the risk of catastrophic floods.Sushil Kumar Singh, a glaciologist at the ISRO Space Applications Centre in Ahmedabad, said, "The beauty and the difficulty of the Himalayas are the clouds." "With NISAR we will be able to get a more continuous and complete data set that would not be possible with instruments that use visible light."

NISAR will also capture the movement and extent of sea ice in both hemispheres. Sea ice insulates the ocean from the air, reducing evaporation and heat loss to the atmosphere. It also reflects sunlight, keeping the planet cool through the albedo effect.

As rising water and air temperatures have increased melting, Arctic sea ice has been diminishing. With more of its surface exposed to sunlight, the Arctic Ocean gains and holds more heat in summer and takes longer to cool. This means less ice formation in winter and faster melting next summer. *—ANI*



NISAR will use two radar systems to monitor change in nearly all of Earth's land and ice surfaces. The satellite marks the first time collaboration of the US and Indian space agencies for an Earth-observing mission
PHOTO: NASA

South Africa calls Israel's campaign in Gaza genocide

Israel will defend itself in the United Nations' highest court starting on Thursday against allegations that its military campaign in Gaza amounts to genocide.

South Africa asked the International Court of Justice to consider Israel's actions in light of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, drawn up in the aftermath of World War II and the Holocaust.

The convention defines genocide as acts such as killings "committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group."

The case will likely drag on for years.

Here are some details on the case and its ramifications.

What is South Africa's Argument?

South Africa's 84-page filing says Israel's actions "are genocidal in character because they are intended to bring about the destruction of a substantial part" of the Palestinians in Gaza.

It asks the ICJ for a series of legally binding rulings. It wants the court to declare that Israel "has breached and continues to breach its obligations under the Genocide Convention," and to order Israel to cease hostilities in Gaza that could amount to breaches of the convention, to offer reparations, and to provide for reconstruction of what it has destroyed in Gaza.

The filing argues that genocidal acts include killing Palestinians, causing serious mental and bodily harm, and deliberately inflicting conditions meant to "bring about their physical destruction as a group." And it says Israeli officials have expressed genocidal intent.

South Africa argues that the court has jurisdiction because both countries are signatories of the genocide convention, whose ninth article says such disputes can be submitted to the International Court of Justice.

Many South Africans, including President Cyril Ramaphosa, compare Israel's policies regarding Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank with South Africa's past apartheid regime of racial segregation. Israel rejects such allegations.

Israeli soldiers take up positions during a ground operation in Khan Younis, Gaza Strip ***PHOTO: AP***

What was Israel's response?

Israel's government swiftly denounced the genocide claim. The Foreign Ministry said South Africa's case lacked a legal foundation and constitutes a "despicable and contemptuous exploitation" of the court.

Eylon Levy, an official in the Israeli prime minister's office, accused South Africa of "giving political and legal cover" to the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas that triggered Israel's campaign, and said Israel would send a legal team to the Hague "to dispel South Africa's absurd blood libel."

An Israeli official said the country, which has a history of ignoring international tribunals, decided to defend itself for several reasons. Among them are Israel's role in promoting the original genocide convention after the Holocaust and the nation's belief that it has "a strong case." He spoke on condition of anonymity because he was discussing behind-the-scenes deliberations.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to press ahead with the war until Hamas is crushed and the more than 100 hostages still held by the militant group in Gaza are freed. He's said that could take several more months.

How did Israel react to earlier court proceedings?

Israel did not attend hearings in 2004 when the ICJ discussed an advisory opinion requested by the UN into the legality of Israel's barrier wall. The court ruled in a non-binding opinion that the wall was "contrary to international law." Israel sent a written statement to the court before the ruling saying it did not consider it to have jurisdiction and should not respond to the UN request for the advisory opinion.

Israel also has in the past refused to cooperate with an investigation after the 2008-9 Gaza war, a UN investigation into the 2014 Gaza war, and the ongoing Human Rights Council investigation into alleged abuses against Palestinians.

Israel is not a member of another Hague-based court, the International Criminal Court. Other countries that are not ICC members include major global powers the United States, China and Russia.

What happens next?

South Africa's filing includes a request for the court to urgently issue legally binding interim orders for Israel to "immediately suspend its military operations in and against Gaza."Such orders, known as provisional measures, would remain while the case progresses. They're legally binding but not always followed. In 2022, in a genocide case filed by Ukraine against Russia, the court ordered Moscow to immediately suspend its invasion, but the order was ignored.

The court is the highest judicial body of the United Nations but it does not have a police force to implement its rulings. If a nation believes another member has failed to comply with an ICJ order, it can report that to the Security Council. The 15-member council is the UN's most powerful body, charged with maintaining international peace and security. Its tools range from sanctions to authorizing military action, but all actions require support from at least nine council nations and no veto by a permanent member the United States, Russia, China, Britain and France.

The court is holding public hearings Thursday and Friday, and lawyers representing South Africa and Israel can make arguments. A panel of 15 judges drawn from around the world, and one each nominated by Israel and South Africa, could take days or weeks to issue a decision on preliminary measures.The court will then enter a lengthy process of considering the full case.Israel could challenge the jurisdiction and seek to have the case thrown out before lawyers start arguing. Other countries that have signed the genocide convention could also apply to make submissions.

Is the court hearing similar cases?

Two other genocide cases are on the court's docket. The case filed by Ukraine shortly after Russia's invasion accuses Moscow of launching the military operation based on trumped-up claims of genocide and accuses Russia of planning acts of genocide in Ukraine. *—PTI*

PHOTO: REUTERS

Ex- Pak PM Nawaz Sharif to launch poll campaign

ISLAMABAD, 11 JAN

Pakistan's former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, whose party is considered a front-runner to win general elections in February, will kick off his campaign next week, aides said, days after the Supreme Court cleared him to run for a fourth term. The campaign for the February 8 poll, delayed since November, looks set to fire up a lacklustre race in an uncertain political environment after Sharif's main rival and former premier Imran Khan, was jailed and disqualified from contesting. "We will, God willing, start our mass campaign on Jan. 15," Pervaiz Rashid, a close Sharif aide told Reuters, adding that the former premier would speak at a rally two days later. *—Reuters*

Pakistan rules out dialogue with TTP

ISLAMABAD, 11 JAN

Pakistan on Thursday said that it was not interested in a dialogue with the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) after a leading cleric visited Kabul and talked of dialogue following his meeting with the Afghan Taliban leadership. Foreign Office spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch in her weekly press briefing said that Pakistan's stance was clear because the TTP had accepted responsibility for numerous terrorist attacks in the country. The spokesperson said there is no change in Pakistan's policy towards the TTP. "We have no dialogue taking place with the TTP nor do we have the intent to hold talks with it which is responsible for several terror incidents in Pakistan," she said. *—PTI*

6.0 magnitude earthquake jolts parts of Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, 11 JAN

Tremors were felt in multiple cities across Pakistan on Thursday following a 6.0 magnitude earthquake with epicentre in the Hindu Kush region of neighbouring Afghanistan, according to the country's meteorological department. So far, there have been no reports of loss of life or property. The 6.0 magnitude earthquake struck at 2:20 pm (local time) in the Hindu Kush region at a depth of 213 kms, the Pakistan Meteorological Department posted on X. Tremors were felt in Islamabad, Lahore, and its surrounding areas, and parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, according to DawnNews TV channel. Other cities that rocked after the jolts include Punjab's Sargodha, Khushab and its surroundings, Mandi Bahauddin, Bhakkar, and Nowshera. Quoting the US Geological Survey (USGS) data, Dawn reported that the quake's magnitude was 6.4 while its epicentre was 44 kms south-southeast of Jurm in Afghanistan. *—PTI*

Boeing jets won't fly until safe after blowout: US

NEW YORK, 11 JAN

Airline regulators will not be rushed into clearing grounded Boeing 737 Max 9 planes after a mid-air blowout, the US government has said. The aircraft, which were suspended in the US following an incident on an Alaska Airlines flight "need to be 100% safe", said Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg. It is unclear when the planes will be allowed to fly again. Boeing's boss, Dave Calhoun, described the incident as a "quality escape". It means the incident was caused by some failure in quality control. The US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) grounded 171 Boeing jets on Saturday that were installed with the same panel after the Alaska Airlines flight was forced to make an emergency landing on Friday. *—BBC NEWS*

Genocide case against Israel: ICJ concludes 1st day of hearing

South Africa filed a case against Israel at the ICJ on 29 December

THE HAGUE, 11 JAN

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) has finished three hours of very detailed descriptions of hearing arguments on day one of case that Israel is committing genocide in its war on Gaza. According to ICJ it is a very compelling case of genocide that Israel is now committing in Gaza.

South Africa is asking the court to quickly decide on urgent provisional measures to ask Israel to stop whatever it is doing: Military action, mass displacement, depriving Gazans of food, shelter, water, and basic healthcare. Historians, who have been following the ICJ for many years, say that this is the most detailed, most gruesome case so far.

While the hearing was taking place

While the ICJ hearing was taking place in The Hague, here is what happened in Gaza and the occupied West Bank:

- Israel's air force says it killed 10 Hamas fighters near the Maghazi camp in central Gaza.
- Israeli bombing near Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Hospital in Deir el-Balah, in central Gaza, killed at least eight people. Four medics with the Palestine Red Crescent were also killed.
- Israeli forces have arrested 28 more Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, bringing the total number of arrests since October 7 to 5,810, according to the Palestinian Prisoner's Society.
- Continuing attacks in central and southern Gaza put three more hospitals at risk of closing.

15 judges, who will be joined by one judge from Israel PHOTO: REUTERS

South Africa's case against Israel at the ICJ

29 DEC, 2023

South Africa files a case against Israel at the ICJ alleging that Israel's military campaign in Gaza amounts to genocide

11 JAN, 2024

- The ICJ to hold its first hearing. For provisional measures, the court has to decide whether it has jurisdiction and if the alleged acts could potentially fall under the scope of the genocide treaty.
- 15 judges, who will be joined by one judge from Israel, South Africa each

A provisional ruling is expected within weeks

- If the court decides to implement an interim measure this would put a legal obligation on
- Israel to end its onslaught
- The court's rulings are final but it has no authority to enforce them

Madonsela lists consequences of not intervening in Gaza war

Vusimuzi Madonsela, a representative for South Africa, tells the court that South Africa has come to the ICJ "to prevent genocide and to do so in the discharge of the international obligation that rests on South Africa and all other states under the convention".

"The consequences of not indicating clear and specific provisional measures and not taking steps to intervene while Israel disregards its international obligations before our eyes would, we fear, be very grave indeed:

- For the Palestinians in Gaza who remain at real risk of further genocidal acts
- For the integrity of the convention, for the rights of South Africa, and
- For the reputation of this court which is equipped with and must exercise its powers to afford an effective realisation of the rights under the convention.

—Courtesy, Al Jazeera

Israel again bombards Southern Gaza

Israel bombarded the southern Gaza Strip overnight, as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken prepared to travel to Egypt on Thursday for more talks aimed at containing Israel's war against Hamas. The diplomat was set to meet Egy ptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in Cairo, a day after talks with Pales tinian Authority leader Mahmud Abbas, who "committed" to reforming the body to potentially reunite Gaza and the occupied West Bank under its leadership after the war, Blinken said. The Middle East trip, his fourth aimed at preventing the conflict's spread, coincided with a UN Security Council resolution on Wednesday demanding an "immediate" end to attacks in the Red Sea by Yemen's Houthi rebels carried out in solidarity with Hamas. *—PTI*

AT LEAST 15 DEAD

Papua New Guinea hit by deadly riots and looting

At least 15 people have died after major riots hit Papua New Guinea PHOTO: AFP

PORT MORESBY, 11 JAN

At least 15 people have died after major riots hit Papua New Guinea, as a 14-day state of emergency was declared.

More than 1,000 troops are on standby "to step in wherever necessary", Prime Minister James Marape said on Thursday. Shops and cars were set alight and supermarkets looted, after police went on strike on Wednesday over a pay dispute. This follows wider tensions in the country over rising costs and high unemployment.

"Breaking the law does not achieve certain outcomes," Marape said in a national address on Thursday. While most of the violence had been curbed by Wednesday evening, after soldiers were deployed and police resumed duty, the prime minister acknowledged that the situation was "still tense". The Port Moresby General Hospital had confirmed eight deaths in the capital Port Moresby, while another seven people were reported to have died in the city of Lae, PNG's second largest.

The absence of police encouraged people from the capital's outskirts to ransack shops and cause wider destruction, locals told the BBC. "We have seen unprecedented level of strife in our city, something that has never happened before in the history of our city and our country," National Capital District Governor Powes Parkop said in a radio address on Wednesday, according to a Reuters report.

He said the looting had largely been carried out by "opportunists". Some violence was also reported to have been carried out by police demonstrators.

The unrest was triggered after police and other public servants staged a protest strike outside parliament on Wednesday, after discovering that their pay had been reduced by up to 50% in their latest pay cheques. *—BBC News*

Nearly 10K died from Covid last month: WHO

GENEVA, 11 JAN

Head of the UN health agency said on Wednesday that holiday gatherings and the spread of the most prominent variant globally led to increased transmission of Covid-19 last month.

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said nearly 10,000 deaths were reported in December, while hospital admissions during the month jumped 42 per cent in nearly 50 countries — mostly in Europe and the Americas — that shared such trend information. "Although 10,000 deaths a month is far less than the peak of the pandemic, this level of preventable deaths is not acceptable," the World Health Organisation (WHO) director-general told reporters from its headquarters in Geneva. He said it was "certain" that cases were on the rise in other places that haven't been reporting, calling on governments to keep up surveillance and provide continued access to treatments and vaccines. Tedros said the JN.1 variant was now the most prominent in the world. It is an omicron variant, so current vaccines should still provide some protection.

Maria Van Kerkhove, technical lead at WHO for Covid-19, cited an increase in respiratory diseases across the globe due to the coronavirus but also flu, rhinovirus and pneumonia. *—AP*

Hasina sworn in as PM of B'desh for 5th term

DHAKA, 11 JAN

Sheikh Hasina was on Thursday sworn in as the prime minister of Bangladesh for the fifth term, days after her Awami League party won an overwhelming majority in the general elections boycotted by the main opposition BNP and its allies.

President Mohammad Shahabuddin administered the oath of office to 76-year-old Hasina at a ceremony joined by politicians, foreign diplomats, civil society figures and senior civil and military officials.

Following the prime minister, the new members of cabinet were sworn in by the President.

Sheikh Hasina PHOTO: PTI

Hasina's party won 223 seats in the 300-member Parliament.

Major opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) of ex-prime minister Khaleda Zia boycotted the elections after their demand for a non-party caretaker government to oversee the 7 January polls was rejected. *—PTI*

Rescuers stand at the site in the aftermath of a Russian missile strike on a hotel in Kharkiv, Ukraine PHOTO: REUTERS

Russian missiles hit Kharkiv hotel

KIYV, 11 JAN

Two Russian missiles have struck a hotel in Ukraine's second-largest city, Kharkiv, injuring 11 people, the Kharkiv governor says.

Photos from Ukraine's State Emergency Service showed the hotel heavily damaged and firefighters at the scene. Governor Oleh Synehubov said the injured included Turkish journalists.

Russia has stepped up air strikes on Ukrainian cities in the past two weeks. Ukrainian officials say dozens of civilians have died in those attacks from drones and missiles. Kharkiv, just 30km from the Russian border, has suffered extensive damage from Russian air strikes since President Vladimir Putin launched his full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

In the latest strike, nine injured were taken to hospital, including a 35-year-old man in a serious condition, the governor said on the Telegram messaging service.

Ukraine builds barricades, digs trenches as focus shifts to defence

Rows of white concrete barricades and coils of razor wire stretch across an open field for more than a kilometre. Trenches with rudimentary living quarters are being dug under cover of darkness. Artillery rumbles not far away.

New defensive lines visited by Reuters near the northeastern city of Kupiansk on 28 Decembershow how Ukraine has stepped up construction of fortifications in recent months as it shifts its military operations against Russia to a more defensive footing. *—BBC News/ Reuters*

RED SEA FEUDS

US, UK hint at army action after largest Houthi attack

WASHINGTON, 11 JAN

The US and UK have hinted they could take military action against Yemen's Houthi rebels, after they repelled the largest attack yet on Red Sea shipping.

Carrier-based jets and warships shot down 21 drones and missiles launched by the Iran-backed group on Tuesday night. The UN Security Council passed a resolution on Wednesday demanding an immediate end to the Houthi attacks.

The text endorsed the right of UN member states to defend their vessels. The Houthis reacted scornfully to it. Their spokesman Mohammed Ali al-Houthi called the resolution a "political game". They claim to be targeting Israeli-linked vessels, in protest at Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza.

The UN resolution demanded "that the Houthis immediately cease all such attacks, which impede global commerce and undermine navigational rights and freedoms as well as regional peace and security". Eleven nations voted for it, but Russia, China, Mozambique and Algeria abstained.

UK's Ministry shared images of the HMS Diamond deploying Sea Viper missiles and guns PHOTO: UK MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

- They claim to be targeting Israeli-linked vessels, in protest at Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza

Earlier, the US and several allies warned of "consequences" for the Houthi attacks in the Red Sea. Asked about potential strikes in Yemen, UK Defence Secretary Grant Shapps said: "Watch this space." The International Chamber of Shipping says 20% of the world's container ships are now avoiding the Red Sea and using the much longer route around the southern tip of Africa instead.

The Houthis said they targeted a US ship on Tuesday providing support to Israel. It was the 26th attack on commercial shipping in the Red Sea since 19 November.

The US military said Iranian-designed one-way attack drones, anti-ship cruise missiles and anti-ship ballistic missiles were launched from Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen at around 21:15 local time. *—BBC News*

IRAN SEIZES OIL TANKER AT CENTER OF MAJOR US-IRAN CRISIS

DUBAI, 11 JAN

Iran's navy seized an oil tanker on Thursday in the Gulf of Oman that once was at the center of a major crisis between Tehran and Washington, officials said, a seizure that further escalates tensions in the Mideast waterways. The vessel was once known as the Suez Rajan and had been involved in a year-long dispute that ultimately saw the US Justice Department seize 1 million barrels of Iranian crude oil on it. The seizure also comes after weeks of attacks by Yemen's Iranian-backed Houthi rebels on shipping in the Red Sea, including their largest barrage ever of drones and missiles launched late Tuesday. *—AP*

EYE ON 2030

Renewable energy growth must accelerate: IEA

LONDON, 11 JAN

Global renewable energy capacity is expected to grow by two and a half times by 2030 but governments need to go further to achieve a goal of tripling it by then agreed at United Nations' climate talks, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said.

In its annual renewable energy outlook report, the IEA said new capacity added last year increased by 50 per cent from the previous year to 510 gigawatts (GW). That takes installed capacity to 3,700 GW. Under current policies and market conditions, global renewables capacity is forecast to grow to a total of 7,300 GW by 2028. To reach the 2030 goal agreed last year, it will require reaching at least 11,000 GW.

IEA said new capacity added last year increased by 50 per cent from the previous year to 510 gigawatts PHOTO: REUTERS

World governments agreed to triple renewable energy generation capacity by 2030 and move away from fossil fuels at the COP28 UN climate conference in Dubai last December. But no mechanism was agreed to finance the shift to clean energy in developing countries. The report said the biggest challenge to meeting the goal will be scaling up financing and deployment of renewables in most emerging and developing economies.

- Over the past year, higher inflation and interest rates have also increased equipment and financing costs of renewables projects and policies have been slow to adjust to the new macro-economic environment

"In the absence of any help for African and low-income countries in Asia and Latin America, they will not be able to reach their clean energy targets. That will be a fault line in reaching the 2030 goal," Fatih Birol, executive director of the IEA said.

Over the past year, higher inflation and interest rates have also increased equipment and financing costs of renewables projects and policies have been slow to adjust to the new macro-economic environment.

Insufficient investment in grids is also hampering faster deployment of renewables, as well as slow and bureaucratic permitting procedures and administrative barriers. Last year, China had the largest growth in renewables and is expected to account for nearly 60 per cent of new renewable capacity by 2028. *—Reuters*

Rupee falls 1 paisa to close at 83.04 against dollar

MUMBAI, 11 JAN

The rupee settled on a flat note with a loss of just 1 paisa at 83.04 (provisional) against the dollar on Thursday on the back of strengthening American currency and sharp rise in crude oil prices.The domestic currency broke its six-day gaining streak despite positive equity market sentiment, as foreign funds outflow dented sentiments. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.05 and traded between the peak of 82.93 and the lowest level of 83.08 against the greenback during the intra-day deals.It finally settled at 83.04 (provisional) against the dollar, down by just one paisa over its previous closing level."The Indian rupee is trading flat. It opened on a positive note on weak Dollar and positive domestic markets. However, it lost its initial gains on some FII outflows and a slight recovery in crude oil prices. The US dollar declined on Wednesday," Anuj Choudhary Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. *—PTI*

Gold remains flat at ₹63,150 per 10 grams

NEW DELHI, 11 JAN

Gold prices remained flat at Rs 63,150 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday, according to HDFC Securities. Silver was also flat at Rs 76,300 per kilogram. HDFC Securities' senior analyst of commodities Saumil Gandhi said, spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading flat at Rs 63,150/ 10 grams, unchanged from the previous close. Meanwhile, in the futures trade, February contract of gold rose Rs 164 to Rs 62,160 per 10 grams on the MCX. Also, March contract of silver climbed Rs 120 to Rs 72,089 per kg on the bourse. In the overseas markets, gold is trading marginally higher at $2,031 per ounce, while silver is down at $22.97/ounce.*—PTI*

JSW Group ties up with Finland-based Coolbrook

NEW DELHI, 11 JAN

JSW Group on Thursday said it has partnered with Finland-based firm Coolbrook to implement a low carbon emission technology at its Vijayanagar plant in Karnataka.In a statement, JSW Group said the partnership follows Coolbrook's successful completion of the first phase of large-scale pilot tests for RotoDynamic Technology at the BrightlandsChemelot Campus in the Netherlands in 2023."This strategic partnership will focus on implementingCoolbrook'sRoto-Dynamic Heater (RDH) Technology at JSW's manufacturing sites at Vijayanagar Works in Karnataka with the primary goal of achieving low CO2 emissions in steel and cement production," it said. The RDH technology utilises renewable electricity to power high-temperature industrial processes in steel and cement production, significantly reducing the need to burn fossil fuels, JSW Group said."Deployment of RDH Technology is expected to have a sizeable impact on the decarbonisation of the group's manufacturing process," P K Murugan, President at JSW Steel Vijayanagar and Salem Works, said. *—PTI*

Startup IPM to set up 100 fuel outlets; to start from Assam

GUWAHATI, 11 JAN

Startup fuel retail firm Indo Petroleum Marketing (IPM) on Thursday said it will set up 100 fuel stations across the country within the next five years while starting its business from Assam.The Delhi-based company has already generated a net worth of Rs 250 crore to roll out its network to sell different types of fuel in the country."IPM will set up retail outlets or petrol pumps across the country to undertake fuel sales to the public. In the first phase, we will set up 100 outlets within five years," IPM Founder GyanPrakash Sharma said.*—PTI*

World cannot afford a 'crypto mania': RBI chief

Shaktikanta Das said the central bank does not 'emulate' others

MUMBAI, 11 JAN

RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das on Thursday said the central bank does not "emulate" others when it comes to regulations and asserted that the bank's as well as his own opposition to cryptocurrencies remain unchanged, a day after US regulators allowed bitcoin Exchange Traded Funds (ETFs).

He also said that emerging markets and the world cannot afford to have a "crypto mania".

"What is good for another market need not be good for us. Therefore our views -- both that of the Reserve Bank and personally that of mine -- remain the same," Das said.

Addressing a financial sector seminar organised by business daily Mint here, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Chief also said that for emerging market economies and advanced economies, travelling down that path of cryptocurrencies will create huge risks which will be very difficult to contain going forward.

"The question is why do you want to go down that road? What is it that you are going to get?," Das said while responding to a query about the development in the US with respect to cryptocurrencies.

Personally Das and RBI, as an institution, are opposed to private cryptocurrencies on the grounds that they pose tremendous threat to the financial stability.

"The US capital markets regulator in the same announcement also issued necessary cautionary advice and necessary warning to investors to be careful along with the risks it poses. Our position, my position and the RBI's position on this remain unchanged irrespective of who does what. Just because someone has done something, we are not here to emulate them," he said.

The remarks were in the context of the US regulator SEC permitting bitcoin ETFs. The approval is seen as a landmark event in the adoption of cryptocurrencies in mainstream finance as the ETF structure gives institutions and financial advisors a familiar and regulated way to have an exposure to bitcoins.

"I don't wish to comment on what a regulator of another country has done; they know what is best for their country. But I would like to say that they themselves have flagged risks in the product and advised people to be very careful. *—PTI*

RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das on Thursday said the central bank does not "emulate" others when it comes to regulations **PHOTO: X**

- Addressing a financial sector seminar organised by business daily Mint here, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Chief also said that for emerging market economies and advanced economies, travelling down that path of cryptocurrencies will create huge risks which will be very difficult to contain going forward.

NEED TO FILL $10.1 T FUNDING GAP

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman speaking at a session during the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit 2024, in Gandhinagar **PHOTO: PTI**

Set up platforms for green credits: FM asks IFSC

GANDHINAGAR, 11 JAN

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday said India has a USD 10.1 trillion funding gap to meet its net zero commitment and asked IFSC to set up a platform where green credits can be traded.

Speaking at a session 'An aspiration of modern India' at the GIFT City, the minister said companies in India will be able to access global funds soon with direct listing on IFSC exchanges.

"The much awaited direct listing of stock in Gift IFSC was announced earlier. We are going through the process in a systematic manner and I'm confident that it will happen at the earliest.

With that Indian companies should be able to access global funds easily being listed in India," she said.

Last year the government had decided to allow listed and unlisted companies to directly list themselves on the IFSC (International Financial Services Centre) exchanges at GIFT City.

Currently, Indian companies can access foreign equity markets only through issuing depository receipts or by listing their debt securities on foreign markets. The finance minister suggested that there should be a platform located at the IFSC where green credits can be traded.

She further said India has a funding gap of USD 10.1 trillion to meet its net zero commitment which has to be fulfilled by 2070 and GIFT City could help in bridging that gap.

"I would think the authorities here should work on getting a platform ready so that green credits can be sold by people who are planting trees.

"Miyawaki forests are coming up all over the country, some credits for that and any other practices that you do in afforestation or activities which are full of the green certification, meaning using renewable energy, solid waste management, and so on, should be able to first come here to say I have credits, which I wouldn't want to sit, let it be traded. This place should be the place for getting those credits bought and sold," Sitharaman said. *—PTI*

Indian manufacturing unit to be operational by early 2025: Micron Technology **PHOTO: X**

Indian manufacturing unit to be operational by early 2025: Micron

GANDHINAGAR, 11 JAN

Bombay High Court has granted interim protection from arrest to a 61-year-old woman owner of a land in Maharashtra's Pune district where a fire at a candle manufacturing factory last month killed 14 people.

A single bench of Justice SarangKotwal on Tuesday granted the interim protection to JannatShikalgar till 6 February and sought the prosecution's response to her plea seeking pre-arrest bail in the case. Shikalgar has been charged by Dehu Road police at Pimpri-Chinchwad in Pune district under Indian Penal Code sections for culpable homicide not amounting to murder, negligent conduct with respect to fire or combustible material and explosive substance and causing hurt, as well as provisions of Explosives Act. The fire following a blast at the sparkling candles manufacturing factory on 8 December, 2023 claimed 14 lives. Shikalgar is the owner of the land where the factory is located. Apart from Shikalgar, the FIR also named her husband and the factory owner. *—PTI*

Google VP calls on Revanth Reddy, expresses desire to work with T'gana govt

NEW DELHI, 11 JAN

Google Vice President Chandrasekhar Thota paid a courtesy call to Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy on Thursday and expressed readiness to work together with the state government.

PHOTO: X/@TELANGANACMO

Noting that Artificial Intelligence would influence every sector, the Google official said his company can partner with the government to develop a digitization agenda for the state in farming, education and health."Google Vice President Chandrasekhar Thota discussed with Reddy investments in Telangana State and expressed desire to work together with the government," an official release said.It also quoted Thota as saying that the company has the technology and expertise to provide quality services to cater to the needs of Telanganacitizens.Reddy also discussed ways to improve road safety using Google Maps and Google Earth platforms, the release added. *—PTI*

'Google should pay a multibillion fine in antitrust shopping case'

LONDON, 11 JAN

A legal adviser to the European Union's top court said on Thursday that Google should pay a whopping fine in a long-running antitrust case in which regulators found the company gave its own shopping recommendations an illegal advantage over rivals in search results. The European Court of Justice's advocate general, Juliane Kokott, recommended rejecting the US search giant's appeal of the 2017 penalty. In a legal opinion, Kokott also proposed upholding the 2.4 billion euro fine that the European Commission, the watchdog, slapped on Google. The commission had accused the company of unfairly directing visitors to its own Google Shopping service to the detriment of competitors. *—AP*

Net direct tax collection rises 19% to ₹14.70 lakh cr till 11 Jan: Data

NEW DELHI, 11 JAN

The net direct tax collection so far this fiscal rose 19.41 per cent to Rs 14.70 lakh crore, reaching about 81 per cent of the full-year target, the income tax department said on Thursday.

The government has budgeted to collect Rs 18.23 lakh crore from direct taxes (personal income tax and corporate tax), 9.75 per cent higher than Rs 16.61 lakh crore mopped up last fiscal.

"Direct Tax collection, net of refunds, stands at Rs 14.70 lakh crore which is 19.41 per cent higher than the net collection for the corresponding period of last year. This collection is 80.61 per cent of the total Budget Estimates of Direct Taxes for FY 2023-24," the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) said in a statement.

Refunds amounting to Rs 2.48 lakh crore have been issued during April 1, 2023 to January 10, 2024.

On a gross basis, direct tax collection up to 10 January, 2024 registered steady growth.

The gross collections are at Rs 17.18 lakh crore, 16.77 per cent higher than the gross collection for the corresponding period of last year.

The growth rate in gross Corporate Income Tax (CIT) and Personal Income Tax (PIT) is 8.32 per cent and 26.11 per cent respectively. *—PTI*

Markets settle marginally higher

MUMBAI, 11 JAN

Benchmark equity indices ended marginally higher on Thursday, trimming most of their intra-day gains, as investors turned cautious ahead of the quarterly results of IT behemoths TCS and Infosys later in the day.

Announcement of the US inflation data and domestic macroeconomic numbers also forced investors to remain on the sidelines. The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 63.47 points or 0.09 per cent to settle at 71,721.18. During the day, it jumped 341.76 points or 0.47 per cent to 71,999.47.The Nifty gained 28.50 points or 0.13 per cent to 21,647.20. Among the Sensex firms, Reliance Industries, UltraTech Cement, Axis Bank, IndusInd Bank, Power Grid, Tata Motors, Tech Mahindra and Tata Consultancy Services were the major gainers.

Infosys, Hindustan Unilever, Wipro, Larsen & Toubro and Nestle were among the laggards.

In Asian markets, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled with gains while Seoul ended lower.

European markets were trading higher. The US markets ended in the positive territory on Wednesday."In anticipation of inflation data from the US, the Indian market exhibited range-bound trade. Though investors anticipate US inflation to ease, global markets, expecting a CY24 interest rate cut, have already priced in optimism. Profit booking occurred amid moderating Q3 corporate earnings and concerns about premium valuations," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 1.56 per cent to USD 78 a barrel. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 1,721.35 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data. BSE benchmark ended 271.50 points or 0.38 per cent higher at 71,657.71 on Wednesday. The Nifty advanced 73.85 points or 0.34 per cent to 21,618.70. *—PTI*

'AIM TO INVEST RESPONSIBLY'

Google lays off hundreds amid cost-cutting drive

SAN FRANCISCO, 11 JAN

Google has laid off hundreds of employees working on its hardware, voice assistance and engineering teams as part of cost-cutting measures.

The cuts come as Google looks towards "responsibly investing in our company's biggest priorities and the significant opportunities ahead," the company said in a statement.

"Some teams are continuing to make these kinds of organisational changes, which include some role eliminations globally," it said.

Google earlier said it was eliminating a few hundred roles, with most of the impact on its augmented reality hardware team.

Google is currently locked in a fierce rivalry with Microsoft, both striving to lead in the artificial intelligence domain **PHOTO: AP**

The cuts follow pledges by executives of Google and its parent company Alphabet to reduce costs. A year ago, Google said it would lay off 12,000 employees or around 6 per cent of its workforce.

Google is not the only technology company cutting back. In the past year, Meta -- the parent company of Facebook -- has slashed more than 20,000 jobs to reassure investors. Meta's stock price gained about 178 per cent in 2023.

Earlier this week, Amazon laid off hundreds of employees in its Prime Video and studios units. It also will lay off about 500 employees who work on its livestreaming platform Twitch.

Google is currently locked in a fierce rivalry with Microsoft as both firms strive to lead in the artificial intelligence domain.

Microsoft has stepped up its artificial intelligence offerings to rival Google's. In September introduced a Copilot feature that incorporates artificial intelligence into products like search engine Bing, browser Edge as well as Windows for its corporate customers. *—AP*

Meta faces new EU complaint over 'pay for privacy' consent

LONDON, 11 JAN

Privacy rights advocacy group noyb on Thursday filed a new complaint against Meta, alleging that the social media platform unlawfully ignores the users' right to easily withdraw consent and asks them to pay.Since the beginning of November, Instagram and Facebook users who don't want to be tracked have to pay a "privacy fee" of up to 251.88 euros per year.

The new complaint, filed with the Austrian data protection authority, alleged that Meta is breaching EU law by framing a choice that makes it very difficult for users to withdraw consent to its tracking ads than to agree.

"This is illegal, as the GDPR clearly states that withdrawing your consent must be 'as easy as' giving it," noyb said in its complaint.

In the complaint, noyb said that the Austrian authority should order Meta to bring its processing operations in compliance with European data protection law and to provide users with an easy way to withdraw their consent -- without having to pay a fee.

In addition, the privacy rights group suggested that the authorities should impose a fine to prevent further violations of the GDPR.It has been six months since the European Court of Justice (CJEU) ruled that Meta's handling of user data was illegal.

"Yet the social media giant has launched its third attempt to circumvent European privacy laws. Instead of asking users for their consent, Meta is now charging people for choosing a privacy-friendly setting," the complaint said. *—IANS*

Privacy rights advocacy group noyb on Thursday filed a new complaint against Meta **PHOTO: X**

BFI to organise talent hunt programmes

NEW DELHI, 11 JAN

The Boxing Federation of India (BFI), in association with power company REC Limited, will organise the Western Open Talent Hunt Programme at the Army Sports Institute in Pune. The competition for the elite and youth categories will take place from 12 to 19 January. The event is part of the four open preliminary tournaments that the BFI has planned to organise across the country for elite, youth, junior and sub-junior categories for both men and women boxers. These are open tournaments and anyone can participate and get themselves enrolled to showcase their skills. "Boxing Federation of India and REC are committed to the growth of Indian boxing and this REC Open Talent Hunt Programme is a significant step to identify and nurture budding boxers from across the country," BFI Secretary general Hemanta Kumar Kalita said. "The programme is open to any boxers who possess the skills and have potential. It is a big opportunity for boxers to make an impact in the national scene." —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Rhythm bags 16th quota place for Paris Olympics

JAKARTA, 11 JAN

Rhythm Sangwan became the 16th Indian shooter to win a Paris Olympic quota place with a bronze medal in the 25m sports pistol event at the Asia Qualifiers here on Thursday. With Rhythm's qualification, India secured its highest-ever number of quota places for the July-August Games, with the previous best being the 2020 Tokyo Olympics where the country had sent 15 shooters. This is the third Olympic quota place for India here after Esha Singh and Varun Tomar bagged the 10m air pistol women's and men's spots on Monday. The 20-year-old Rhythm, who hails from Haryana and was a part of the team that won the 25m sports pistol gold at the Hangzhou Asian Games last year along with Esha and Manu Bhaker, shot 28 in the final to settle for bronze. —*PTI*

Badami and Wadhawan qualify for main draw

MUMBAI, 11 JAN

Hasan Badami and Samay Wadhawan won their respective matches by an identical 4-2 margin in a qualifying draw second round match of the All India Snooker Open here on Thursday. Badami started in rousing fashion piecing together a perfect break of 92 in the opening frame against Briju Kanani, who fought well, but was unable to match the superior play of his opponent. The lanky Badami went on to wrap up the contest registering a 92-1, 2-61, 64-9, 60-16, 34-61 and 68-6 victory. Meanwhile, Wadhawan was his cool composed self and warded off a spirited challenge from Rohan Sakalkar and snatched a well-deserved 73-37, 61-45, 20-54, 49-18, 56-68 and 64-26 victory to join Badami in the main draw. —*PTI*

Its Gujarat vs Chennai in Ultimate Kho Kho final

CUTTACK, 11 JAN

Gujarat Giants marched into the final of Ultimate Kho Kho after beating defending champions Odisha Juggernauts 29-27 in the first semifinal here on Thursday. Gujarat Giants dominated the first innings as their opponents seemingly switched off. Odisha Juggernauts put in an improved show in the second half, but the nine-point advantage they conceded in the first proved too much to overcome. Suyash Gargate and Sanket Kadam were the pick of the attackers for Gujarat Giants with six points each at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium. —*PTI*

Madrid beats Atletico 5-3 in extra time thriller

2 late goals help Madrid to reach Spanish Super Cup final

RIYADH, 11 JAN

After own-goals, goalkeeping blunders and a milestone by Antoine Griezmann, Real Madrid outlasted Atletico Madrid in thrilling extra time victory in the semifinal of Spanish Super Cup in Saudi Arabia on Wednesday.

Two late goals gave Madrid a 5-3 win over its rival in a match in which Griezmann surpassed Luis Aragonés as Atletico's all-time top scorer with 174 goals. Madrid will play Sunday's final against either Barcelona or Osasuna, who meet on Thursday in Riyadh.

"It was a back-and-forth match," Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said. "They did well in the first half and in the second we were able to improve. Both teams played very well. It was a spectacular match, we won because we had a bit more energy in the end." Atletico took the lead with a header by Mario Hermoso after a cross by Griezmann six minutes into the match, but Madrid went ahead with Antonio Rüdiger scoring in the 20th and Ferland Mendy in the 29th.

Madrid will play Sunday's final against either Barcelona or Osasuna, who meet on Thursday PHOTO: X/REAL MADRID FC

Griezmann scored his milestone goal with a right-footed low shot from outside the area after using a nifty move to change directions and get past defenders in the 37th. The France forward had gone scoreless in three straight games since tying Aragonés with a pair of goals against Getafe in the Spanish league in December.

An own-goal by Rüdiger in the 78th put Atletico ahead again before Dani Carvajal equalized in the 85th to send the game into extra time. Rüdiger's own-goal came after a mistake by Madrid goalkeeper Kepa Arrizabalaga while going for a ball crossed into the area. Kepa couldn't hold on to the ball and it ricocheted off Rüdiger and went backward into the net.

Madrid took the lead late in extra time after Atletico defender Stefan Savic found his own net while trying to intercept a cross by Carvajal in the 116th, and Brahim Díaz sealed Madrid's win in stoppage time by hitting the open net after Atletico goalkeeper Jan Oblak had left his area to try to help the attack the other way. Díaz sped past Oblak near midfield to get to the ball and send it into the open net. —*AP*

'Women's hockey team is focussing on sharpening skills'

RANCHI, 11 JAN

The Indian women's hockey team is focussing on sharpening skills and synchronizing movements of its forwards to form a potent attacking force in its bid to clinch an Olympic berth in the qualifying tournament beginning here Saturday, striker Lalremsiami Hmarzote said on Thursday.

The top three teams in the eight-country tournament, to be played between January 13 and 19, will qualify for the Paris Olympics this year. Lalremsiami highlighted the team's meticulous approach towards fine-turning the forward line dynamics.

"Our preparations have centred on fortifying our forward line. We've dedicated ourselves to enhancing our coordination, sharpening our skills, and synchronizing our movements to create a potent attacking force," she said.

Lalremsiami PHOTO: X

- The top three teams in the eight-country tournament, to be played between January 13 and 19, will qualify for the Paris Olympics this year

"We're entering the tournament with a sense of preparedness and eagerness to execute our plans effectively."

"Our focus remains on optimizing our forward line capabilities to secure our place at the Paris Olympics."

With a focus on precision, timing and adaptability, Lalremsiami emphasized them as the common goal within the forward line. "Each member brings a unique skill set to the turf, and our collective goal is to seamlessly blend our strengths to create impactful opportunities during the tournament," said Lalremsiami who was part of the Indian team that won a bronze medal in the Hangzhou Asian Games last year.

"Every training session has been instrumental in fine-tuning our strategies and understanding each other's playing styles. We're driven by a shared determination to make a difference on the field and contribute significantly to the team's success." —*PTI*

INDIAN WRESTLER VICKY TO FIGHT FOR BRONZE

ZAGREB, 11 JAN

Young Indian wrestler Vicky Chahar will fight for bronze medal in the men's 97kg category but it was curtains for Sumit in the 125kg at the Zagreb Open Ranking Series tournament here on Thursday.

The 20-year-old Vicky lost to Iran's Amirali Hamid Azarpira 0-10 in the semifinal bout and is set to take on USA's Isaac Whitman Trumble for a bronze later in the day. Vicky had defeated Georgia's Mamuka Kordzaia 5-0 in the quarterfinals after beating Illia Archaia of Ukraine 6-2 in the pre-quarterfinals. In the qualification round, Vicky got the better of Zbigniew Baranowski of Poland 5-2.

Sumit, on the other hand, lost to Canada's Amarveer Dhesi 1-2 in the pre-quarterfinals. Amarveer then suffered a loss to Mason Mark Parris in the quarterfinals to end his hopes in the repechage round. —*PTI*

Satwik-Chirag enters men's doubles QF

KUALA LUMPUR, 11 JAN

India's Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty continued their impressive run to advance to the men's doubles quarterfinals but Kidambi Srikanth failed to cross the second round at Malaysia Open Super 1000 badminton tournament here on Thursday.

World No 2 Satwik and Chirag, who had a stellar run in 2023 with six titles, beat France's world No 36 Lucas Corvee and Ronan Labar 21-11 21-18 to set up a clash with China's world No 32 He Ji Ting and Ren Xiang Yu.

Srikanth, however, failed to rein in his errors and went down 13-21 17-21 to Hong Kong's Ng Ka Long Angus in the second round. Satwik and Chirag, the Asian Games gold medallists, dished out an aggressive game to gallop to 11-2 lead at the break in the opening game. A seven-point burst after resumption gave the French pair hope as they made it 12-14.

But the Indian combination soon found their bearing to run away with the opening game after gathering the remaining seven points on the trot. The Indians, however, wouldn't have been prepared for what came next as Corvee and Labar came out blazing on all cylinders to take an 11-4 cushion in the interval.

PHOTO: X

From 4-11, Satwik and Chirag, however, made it 16-16 with Chirag and Satwik once again scripting a remarkable recovery. Once the French went long, the Indians had the advantage. Labar pounced on a weak return to keep themselves in the hunt. A deception from Chirag, followed by a flat exchange, gave India three match points. They squandered one before Labar served into the net. Earlier, a series of unforced errors and bad line judgements put Srikanth, world ranked 24, on the back foot as world No. 20 Ka Long looked in fine fettle during the 38-minute men's singles match.

Srikanth had a promising start as he led 6-1 at one stage but his inconsistencies in execution once again came to the fore as Ka Long reeled off six straight points to turn the tables. —*PTI*

ASIAN CUP 2024

Son Heung-Min from South Korea, Wataru Endo from Japan, Sunil Chhetri from India, Kaoru Mitoma from Japan and Hwang Hee-chan from South Korea are the star players to watch out for Asian Cup 2024 PHOTO: AP AND X

World Cup host Qatar stages latest soccer tournament

DOHA, 11 JAN

Just over a year after Lionel Messi led Argentina to the World Cup title in Qatar, international soccer is back in the Middle Eastern nation for the Asian Cup.

The 18th edition of the competition kicks off in Lusail on Friday.

The tournament was originally scheduled for 2023 in China, but those plans were canceled as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Qatar, which was already preparing for the 2022 World Cup with an array of state-of-the-art stadiums, was selected from a second round of bidding and a new date of 2024 was set for the biggest international soccer event in the region.

Asia's best

Qatar won the title for the first time in 2019 and will defend the trophy against the elite of Asian soccer.

World Cup-qualifying teams South Korea, Japan, Australia, Saudi Arabia and Iran are among the nations competing in the tournament that runs from 12 January through 10 February.

Saudi Arabia secured one of the most famous upsets in World Cup history when it beat Argentina in its opening game in Qatar, and Japan topped a group that included Spain and Germany to advance to the knockout stage.

Format

The quadrennial tournament sees 24 teams drawn into six groups of four that play in a round-robin format. The top two from each group and the four best third-placed teams advance to the round of 16.

Favourite

Japan is the favourite to win the trophy for a fifth time, ahead of South Korea, Australia, Iran and Saudi Arabia. Hong Kong is the big outsider.

Stadium

The Asian Cup will be another chance to see many of the spectacular stadiums used to host the World Cup. Lusail, which hosted arguably the greatest World Cup final in history when Argentina beat France on penalties after a 3-3 draw, will be used for the opening game of the Asian Cup and the final. Al Bayt Stadium was one of the most distinctive from the World Cup, having been constructed to look like a tent.

Star players

Tottenham's South Korea forward Son Heung-Min is perhaps the biggest star attraction, but there are a number of players from leading clubs who will be in action. Liverpool midfielder Wataru Endo will be competing for Japan and he will be joined by countrymen Kaoru Mitoma (Brighton), Takumi Minamino (Monaco) and Takehiro Tomiyasu (Arsenal). On-loan Roma forward Sardar Azmoun is part of Iran's squad, while South Korea also has Bayern Munich defender Kim Minjae, Wolverhampton forward Hwang Hee-Chan and Paris Saint-Germain midfielder Lee Kang-in. —*AP*

1st woman referee Yamashita to officiate Aus vs India

Japan's Yoshimi Yamashita will become the first woman referee to officiate a men's AFC Asian Cup match on Saturday when she takes charge of the AFC Asian Cup 2023 Group B game between former champions Australia and India, Asia's football body AFC said on Thursday. Yamashita will be supported by assistant referees Makoto Bozono and Naomi Teshirogi, making it an all-female trio who will oversee the encounter at the Ahmed bin Ali Stadium. The trio have already teamed up in club matches at the 2019 AFC Cup, the 2022 AFC Champions League and Japan's J1 League last year. —*Reuters*

Dube shines on comeback to script cosy win for India

MOHALI, 11 JAN

India's fringe players, led by Shivam Dube, made the opportunity count to set up a six-wicket win over Afghanistan in the first T20 of the three-match series here on Thursday.

A lively 68-run partnership off 43 balls between the seasoned Mohammad Nabi (42 off 27) and youthful Azmatullah Omarzai (29 off 22) lifted Afghanistan to 158 for five after India dominated the powerplay. The total posted was not enough in good batting conditions as India got home comfortably in 17.3 overs.

Dube (60 not out), playing his first T20 since the Asian Games, and Tilak Varma (26) shared a 44-run stand off 29 balls to give Indian innings momentum after losing the openers inside four overs. Rohit Sharma (0), returning to T20s after 14 months, and Shubman Gill (23) got involved in an avoidable mix-up that limited the Indian skipper's stay to just two balls. The usually calm and cool Rohit did not hide his anger on this occasion as Gill did not pay heed to his call for a quick single.

Shivam Dube celebrates half-century with Rinku Singh during the first T20I match in Mohali on Thursday PHOTO: X/BCCI

Gill was not able to stay for long but Varma and Dube were able to take the innings forward and India did not look back from there on. Dube, who is seen as a back up to injury prone Hardik Pandya, used his long levers efficiently and his disdainful drives on the off side stood out. He ended the game in style with a straight six and four in the fine leg region.

Jitesh Sharma (31) also gave a good account of himself before Rinku Singh (16 not out off 9) joined Dube in the middle and took the team home. Earlier, a stroke-filled partnership between Nabi and Omarzai was just what Afghanistan needed after India reduced the visitors to 57 for three in 10 overs amid chilly conditions at the PCA Stadium.

Openers Rahamanullah Gurbaz (23 off 28) and skipper Ibrahim Zadran (25 off 22) could only find four boundaries in the powerplay. —*PTI*

AUS OPEN: DJOKER SWINGS BAT

Djokovic and Swiatek get No 1 seedings

SYDNEY, 11 JAN

Playing true to their rankings, defending champion Novak Djokovic and Iga Swiatek will be the top seeds at the Australian Open in the first Grand Slam tournament of the year which begins Sunday at Melbourne Park.

The men's seedings mirror the ATP rankings as of Wednesday from Nos 1-32, with 24-time major winner Djokovic followed by Wimbledon champion Carlos Alcaraz, the only player to beat him a Grand Slam event in 2023. The women's seedings followed the WTA rankings from Nos 1-8, then Barbora Krejcikova is promoted to No 9 at Melbourne Park because of the injury enforced absence of her fellow Czech Karolina Muchova, the French Open finalist last year.

Muchova hasn't played since losing to eventual champion Coco Gauff in the U.S. Open semifinals last September. Two-time Wimbledon champion Petra Kvitova is pregnant and skipping the year's first major and last year's US Open semifinalist Madison Keys has an injured shoulder, taking the players ranked 17th and 18th out of the equation for Australia.

The seedings mean that players in the top 32 avoid each other in the early rounds when the brackets are determined for the major tournaments. The top two seeded players cannot meet before the final. —*AP*

Novac Djokovic engaged in a tennis dual with Australia's star batter Steve Smith, tried his hands at batting, and engaged in multiple other sporting activities on the iconic centre court in Melbournea, Australia PHOTO: X/AUSTRALIAN OPEN AND AP

Mumbai FC come from behind to take full pts

BHUBANESWAR, 11 JAN

Mumbai City came from a goal down to beat Gokulam Kerala 2-1 in their Group C match of the Kalinga Super Cup here on Thursday.

An off-colour and youngster-filled Mumbai City were made to struggle for the points and rely on a penalty to seal it in injury time. Mumbai City settled into their groove early into the game and were almost presented with a goal in the fourth minute of the game.

Abdenasser El Khayati shrugged off his marker on the left wing, before crossing the ball into the six-yard area, where Avilash Paul punched it into the path of Nathan Rodrigues. The youngster volleyed high.

The game entered a pattern, where Mumbai City, predictably, controlled the proceedings, and constantly probed Gokulam's defensive structure. Their hard pressing and eagerness to win the second ball caused huge problems for Gokulam who struggled at times to even get out of their half.

In the 12th minute, this high press style saw Jayesh Rane steal the ball just outside the Gokulam box and lay it to Gurkirat Singh.

The striker shot wide. Mumbai City's ability to keep the pressure also came with its own caveats that of an overconfidence seeping in. Gokulam made them pay for it in the 23rd minute, off a simple two pass counter attack. Debutant Nikola Stojanovic played a long ball from his own half into the Mumbai box, where Aminou Bouba rose highest to head it towards goal. —*PTI*